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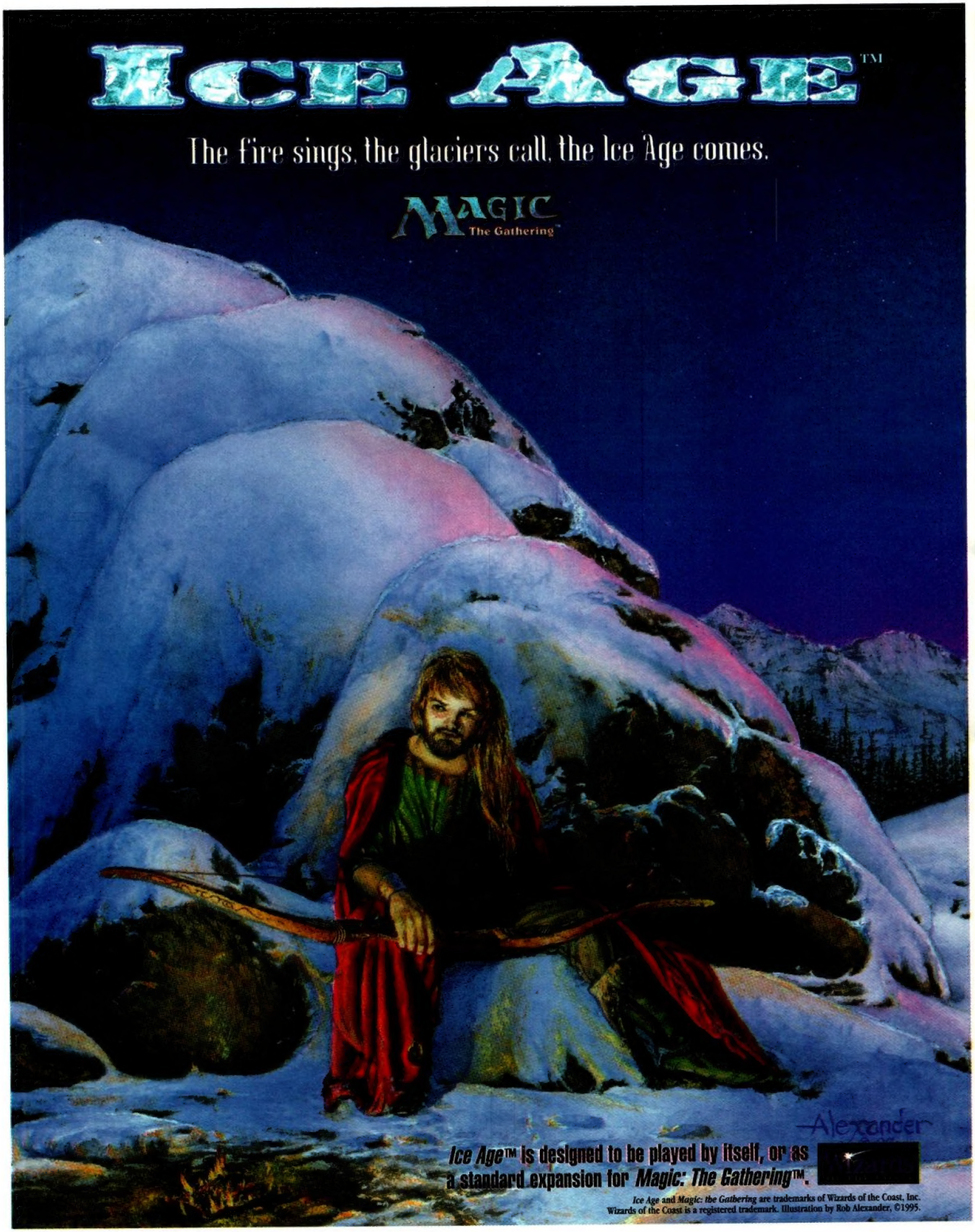
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SHADIS
The Independent Games Magazine
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Issue #18.5
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April 1993

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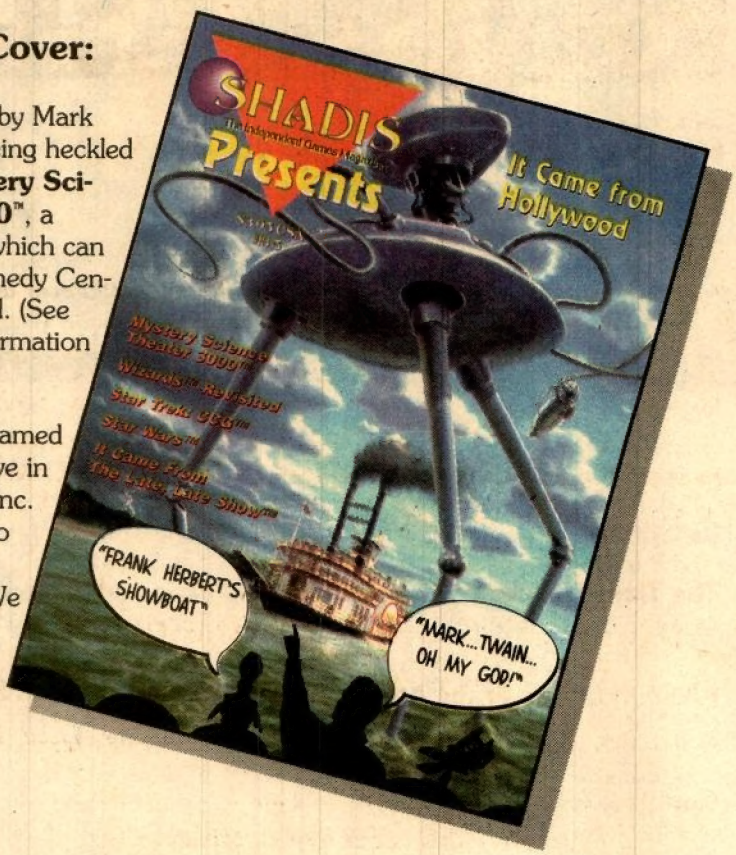
About the Cover:

This month's cover, by Mark Maxwell, is in fact being heckled by the stars of **Mystery Science Theater 3000™**, a long–running show which can be found on the Comedy Central cable TV channel. (See page 8 for more information about the show.)

The cover art was beamed to the Satellite of Love in care of Best Brains, Inc. and we asked them to send us their best MSTification for it. We feel they came through.



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Declaration of Independence

The staff of **SHADIS** is determined to keep this publication independent and bringing our readers the best coverage of the gaming industry available. Although the **Alderac Entertainment Group**, publishers of **SHADIS**, publishes game systems and supplements, **SHADIS** will not become a house-organ.

Our policy (written in stone) is that **SHADIS** will not review products produced by **AEG** and that **AEG** is limited to one full page ad per issue. In addition, articles relating to **AEG** products will be limited to two issues per year — not to exceed a combined total of fifteen pages for both issues. (that works out to 15 pages per 672 published pages of **SHADIS**.)

This policy actually penalizes **AEG** for being associated with **SHADIS** rather than having an unfair advantage over other companies. We hope this policy demonstrates our determination to keep **SHADIS** truly independent.

Amendment: The above declaration applies only to regular issues of **SHADIS Magazine.** AEG reserves the right to publish special issues of **SHADIS PRESENTS** which focus on in-house products. ❑

Cries From the Attic

Editorial of a Madman

"The Stuff Dreams are Made of"

I think one of the reasons I love role-playing games is that it's the closest I'll ever come to being like those guys in the movies.

Where else can I jump from an airplane without a parachute and live to tell about it? Popular television shows and movies allow us to escape our boring day-to-day lives and like the famous, David Bowie song says, "Be heroes - for just one day."

Last week I hung from a treacherous ledge while the Captain of the Guard stomped on my fingers - trying desperately to make me fall to my death. Instead, I was able to grab his belt pouch and send him spiraling downward. A few weeks before that I was cornered in a deep labyrinth by a fire-breathing dragon who mocked my puniness (he ended up eating those words).

Role-playing games go hand-in-hand with television, video and film in making up the great modern escapism. For years Gamemasters have turned to movies and television as sources of inspiration. Savvy game companies have chased down movie licenses like, **Star Wars**, **Star Trek**, **Indiana Jones**, **Aliens** and many others.

Recently, though, things have begun to take a different spin. Now Hollywood is looking at the gaming industry for their next hit. Games like **Battletech**, **Mutant Chronicles**, and **AD&D** itself are heading for the big screen. And that's just the beginning.

The recent mega-success of **Magic: The Gathering**, coupled with a few hits at the box office could mean we are about to see the largest surge of growth in the gaming industry since role-playing hit the scene with a bang in the late 70's. Already, MTG has attracted hundreds of thousands of new gamers into our small hobby (along with their wallets).

It seems everyone is interested in games these days. Oh, but it's not cool to call them games anymore - now everything is *'interactive entertainment'*.

These days, games are on the cutting edge of technology. Virtual reality, CD Roms and even live-action games enhanced with hi-tech gadgetry are popping up everywhere.

Been to Las Vegas lately? You might be surprised - virtual reality and interactive entertainment centers are taking over the casinos. One hotel will soon be featuring a live-action Star Trek theme. Guests at the hotel will assume a rank, position and character of a federation officer serving aboard a Federation starship. Their tour of duty includes their own personal crew quarters, bridge duty and even a little R&R time to spend in Forward 10 rubbing elbows with other crewmembers.

So if anyone thought role-playing was in danger of becoming extinct - they may have to seriously rethink their position. Role-playing is evolving and is quite healthy - thank you. Best of all, the old stigmas associated with steam tunnels, suicide and the occult are becoming a distant memory along with other popular myths.

In this issue of **SHADIS PRESENTS** we attempted to pull together an assortment of articles dealing with popular movie/tv themes. We also decided to have a little fun and bring you a peek behind the scenes of **Mystery Science Theater 3000**.

You'll also find a special **Hook, Line and Sinker** contest inside. Figure out what movies inspired each HLS scenario and win a **FREE** four day pass to **GEN CON 95**! Don't delay in turning in your answers - the deadline is June 15th!!!

Don't forget to pick up a copy of the next issue of SHADIS (#19)! We've added an additional 16 pages - at 128 pages that makes SHADIS the largest games magazine available. We'll put those extra pages to good use.

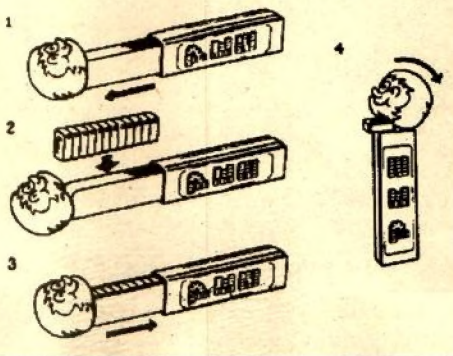
Enjoy the issue and keep those letters coming. Somebody get this robot off my desk.

Jolly R. Blackburn
March 28, 199

SHADIS

READER SERVICE NO. 1

Proper procedure for filling a PEZ™ Dispenser with Candy.



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GARFIELD GAMES

Mail Bag

Our Readers Talk Back

Greetings Dear Readers,

Due to space considerations, some letters have been edited.

The mail just doesn't seem to stop. Oh dear. We read each and every letter, so even if it isn't printed, your comments are welcome and your suggestions and constructive criticisms are thoughtfully considered. So keep the letters coming. Remember SHADIS is an interactive magazine – we want you, the reader, to be involved.

Gameweaver

Dear SHADIS,

As a small publisher, I know how important that little thread of subscription money can be the difference between life and death. But I have taken another tact and want you to know that I'm doing it and why.

I look for, and buy, small press zines in the shops because I think it does better to encourage the shop owner to keep it in stock, so more random factor exposures become possible. Almost everything I now love was a result of a random act of art in the universe - from role playing games to dim sum.

So my name doesn't appear on your subscriber lists, but I go out of my way to find your magazine. I will buy some of the other small zines (I will really miss **Last Province** from Scotland) but your zines are the ones I read on the BART trains, I keep out at my table over lunch or keep on my coffee table to encourage questions and arguments with gaming visitors.

But without hearing from your, does encouraging the retailer fit into your overall plan. I chat them up on line, buy them (pay more for store copies most of the time, when I can find them) and leave them around as conversation starters.

What do you think best serves your magazine?

RadioJoe
America Online

Thanks for your letter Joe. By all means support your local gameshop; we encourage our readers to buy their issues of SHADIS right off the stand. In fact we want SHADIS in every gamestore out there which is why we are offering a reward to anyone who turns in a gamestore who isn't carrying SHADIS. We want to get such renegade game shops a free sample of SHADIS and a list of our distributors so that they can order us.

I appreciate your efforts to support small press and hope you continue to do so. If there is anything we can do to help, please let us know.

JRB

Dear SHADIS,

Jolly, just a little note to let you know how much I really enjoy SHADIS. It's a great publication that an old gamer like myself, loves to read whenever I can. You have great articles, good reviews,and most importantly, a good comic strip (i.e. knights).

All in all a wonderful magazine that I expect great things out of in the future.

I work part-time for a comic and card store so issue 17.5 was both a big seller, and a great source of information that was received well. I just sent in my subscription order and have several customers that are subscribers through our store as well. Meaning of course that every month we hold an issue for them. You have my vote for best magazine on the market, keep up the good work, and I look forward to future issues.

Derron Whitaker
Comic Central
Cincinnati, Ohio

Thanks Derron! I wish more gamestores offered to hold issues for their customers. We are constantly hearing from upset readers who missed an issue of SHADIS because it sold out at their local shop. And thanks for your vote!

As a matter of fact, we just returned from GAMA where we learned SHADIS has been nominated for 'Best Professional Gaming Magazine' of the year for the Origins Awards. Many thanks to all of you out there who nominated us.

JRB

Dear SHADIS,

I first noticed your magazine when a dealer that I know talked me into buying issue #17 for **The Conquering**™. The funny thing is that I haven't even played that yet because the great articles in your magazine got me back into role-playing like never before and I don't play Magic as much as I used to.

My vote is to cut **Bright Future**. As the aforementioned comics build on past issues of the magazine, they are hard to follow. (unlike **Knights of the Dinner Table**, which is the most hilarious thing I have seen in years, especially the one in the back of issue #17.5; it's so TRUE!)

I really don't care about interviews either, because how can I use it in my campaign? You need to keep PBM stuff in one way or another, though, especially if you want to stay a true gamers magazine.

Second, your RPG information is almost all fantasy; no sci-fi stuff at all. I appreciate a good fantasy RPG as well as anybody, but sci-fi is my first love. It's probably a lack of submissions in that field, but if you could get some sci-fi game articles it would help round out your magazine and keep your attraction to all gamers, no matter what their game.

Aaron Thorne

Dear SHADIS,

Just wanted to say that I thought the Head to Head reviews in issue 17.5 were the BEST reviews I've seen anywhere.

The fact that each reviewer was forced to find something good to say about each product, as well as something bad, provided an interesting angle.

I would suggest that you adopt this format for your reviews in general. While I have your attention, I want to thank you for putting out such a great magazine. SHADIS has an atmosphere about it that makes one feel he is pulling up a chair at his favorite gaming group.

Add me to the list of burnt out gamers who has returned to the fold because SHADIS has gotten me excited about gaming again.

Keep up the good work.

Jason Miles
Ontario, Canada

As a matter of fact, Jason we are going to do just that. Look for more Head to Head reviews in future issues of SHADIS covering your favorite products.

And, oh yeah, welcome back to gaming.

JRB

In the past, ancient priests, shamans, and wise men recognized the existence of magic and the presence of vampires, ghosts and demons. They were not things of myth or legend, but an accepted part of every day life. The people prayed and struggled against these dark forces, keeping them in check.

Ley lines. The ancient orientals called them *Feng-shui*, dragon tracks. Lines of mystic energy. Along these lines of energy demons and other supernatural beings could enter our world and sorcerers could draw upon great magic. The Chinese studied these lines, learned their secrets, and developed *Geomancy* which is practiced to this very day.

Today, humankind has rejected the concept of magic and monsters. They dismiss such notions as superstition, myth and madness. They ignore the most blatant evidence to the contrary and happily bury it under scientific explanations, whether they make sense or not. And the monsters flourish.

Demonic, hellish abominations stalk the streets. Vampires roam the night freely. Supernatural predators lie in wait in the alley ways and ghosts haunt the ruins of urban decay. Earth is being invaded and nobody will stop the tide of invasion because they won't admit the invaders exist.

On another front, the ley lines pulse with mystic energy long forgotten or ignored. An energy tapped by a handful of men and women (and supernatural abominations) who have rediscovered arcane knowledge. Some are protectors of the innocent and seekers of truth and knowledge. Others are selfish, vengeful or evil people who serve the forces of evil, both human and inhuman, and unleash the primordial forces they summon into our unsuspecting world.

Fate. Humankind's defense has fallen to the hands of madmen and crackpots: mystics, psychics, paranormal investigators, arcanists and other believers in magic and the supernatural. An underground society scorned by the authorities, mocked by men of science and dismissed by the public. Thus, they wage a private and secret war against the supernatural and the forces of evil. They are the shadowy sentinels who watch over us while we sleep.

Meanwhile, the mean streets continue to get a little scarier and much more dangerous.

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If you play **Rifts**, you already know the game mechanics of magic and ley lines, as well as their full power and danger. Perhaps the right characters at the right time could prevent the "Coming of the Rifts." But to do so they must unlock the secrets of magic and fight the horrors of the supernatural.

Highlights Include:

- **Nine Occupational Character Classes.**
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SHADIS
The Independent Games Magazine

Interrogations

Mystery Science Theater 3000™

In the not-too-distant future—
Next Sunday A.D.—
There was a guy named Joel,
Not too different from you or me.
He worked at Gizmonic Institute,
Just another face in a red jumpsuit.
He did a good job cleaning up the place,
But his bosses didn't like him
So they shot him into space.

We'll send him cheesy movies,
The worst we can find (la-la-la).
He'll have to sit and watch them all,
And we'll monitor his mind (la-la-la).
Now keep in mind Joel can't control
Where the movies begin or end (la-la-la)
Because he used those special parts
To make his robot friends.

Robot Roll Call: (Let's go!)
Cambot! (Pan left!)
Gypsy! (Hi, girl!)
Tom Servo! (What a cool guy!)
Croooow! (What a wisecracker!)

If you're wondering how he eats and breathes
and other science facts (la la la),
Then repeat to yourself, "It's just a show,
I should really just relax
For Mystery Science Theater 3000!"

Opening 'Love Theme" from MST3K
Lyrics: Joel Hodgson and Josh Weinstein
Music: Charles Erickson and Joel Hodgson

Gamers have been doing it for years - making fun of cheezy movies and lame plot-lines. Perhaps that's why they seem to love **MST3K** and those little wise-cracking robots who look as though they were built from items secured at a neighborhood rummage sale.

The following is a FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) file that has been lovingly nutured and passed around on the Internet for quite some time (see the end of this article for the appropriate credits). Knowing that gamers share common interests, we thought our readers would enjoy a romp on the Satellite of Love.

That's right, everything you've always wanted to know about MST3K but were afraid to ask in public.

Q: What is **Mystery Science Theater 3000**?

A: *It's an unique comedy TV program that is run on the* ***Comedy Central*** *cable TV network.*

Q: What is it about?

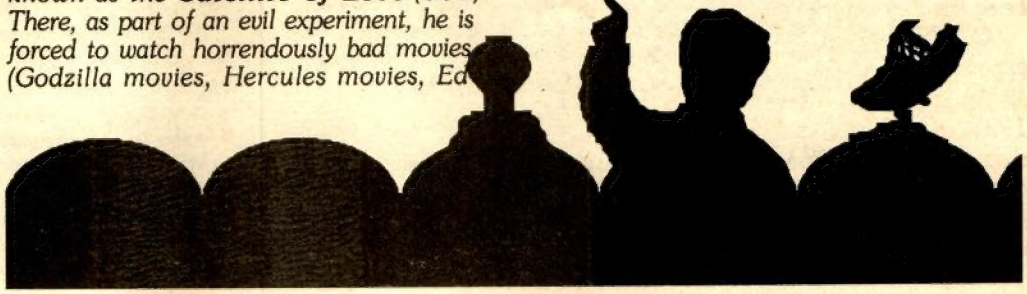
A: *That takes a bit of explaining. The main character is Mike Nelson (played by actor Michael J. Nelson), a temp worker who found himself in the employ of a mad scientist, Dr. Clayton Forrester (known as Dr. F). The job assignment proved anything but temporary, however—Mike was knocked unconscious, put aboard a rocket, shot into space, and marooned on an orbiting satellite, known as the* ***Satellite of Love*** *(SOL). There, as part of an evil experiment, he is forced to watch horrendously bad movies (Godzilla movies, Hercules movies, Ed Wood movies, things like that) so that Dr. F can see what it does to Mike's mind.*

On board the SOL, Mike discovered four robots: a golden bird-like thing called ***Crow****, a red, vaguely fire hydrant-ish bot called* ***Tom Servo****, a large hammer-headed robot named* ***Gypsy*** *and a floating, circular robot named* ***Cambot****, through whose mechanical eyes we see the proceedings. Crow and Tom's functions are to join Mike in the* ***Mystery Science Theater*** *as he is forced to watch the movies.*

Each week, after a few opening pleasantries, Dr. F pushes a button and Mike and the bots (M&TB) yell "Movie Sign!" and rush to their places in the theater as we, the viewers, see Cambot's path through several strange hatchways to his place in the back of the theater. There he watches as M&TB take their seats and this week's horrible movie begins. We can see M&TB sitting in theater seats at the bottom of our TV screens, and as they watch the movie, the three offer riotously funny commentary, satire and general heckling.

The comments, about 700 per episode, run the gamut from scatological silliness to extremely complex wordplay and the obscurest of pop culture references.

The show lasts two hours, enough time for M&TB to sit through an entire horrible movie and maybe a dreadful short film as well. And three times during the film, they



come out of the theater to the SOL's bridge for short comedy bits known as "host segments" (HS): tomfoolery which may or may not have some connection to the film they've been watching.

Q: What does **MST3K** mean?

A: *That's what MSTies call the show for short: MST stands for Mystery Science Theater, and 3K is the abbreviation for 3000.*

Q: What are **MSTies**?

A: *Fans of the show refer to themselves as MSTies (pronounced MIS-teez). Also variously spelled Misties, Mysties and Mistees.*

Q: Wasn't there a different star of the show previously?

A: *Yes, the original host of the series was the series' creator, stand-up comedian Joel Hodgson. Joel's character, Joel Robinson, was a janitor at a top secret scientific institute where Dr. F. then worked. He was tricked by Dr. F. into boarding the SOL just before it lifted off, so that he could begin the movie watching experiment. It was Joel who built the robots out of pieces of the SOL and stray junk lying around the ship (except for Cambot, who may have been built by Dr. F).*

Q: What happened to Joel? How did they explain his departure?

A: *In the episode (first run Oct. 23, 1993) in which Mike's character was introduced, Gypsy overheard Dr. F and his assistant Frank discussing their plans to kill Mike, and mistakenly assumed they were planning to kill Joel. With Mike's help, Gypsy learned that the SOL was carrying a secret escape pod. Desperate to save Joel, Gypsy tossed him into the escape pod and sent him back to Earth, before he could object. He landed safely in the Australian Outback, (hopefully, as one of the Mads pointed out, on Yahoo Serious). Furious at Joel's escape, Dr. F and Frank sent Mike up to the SOL to take his place.*

Q: Why did they change hosts?

A: *Hodgson, who had created the series and labored on it ceaselessly for five years, asked off the show, pleading burnout. Hodgson, a shy person, was also reportedly very uncomfortable in front of the camera, and even more uncomfortable with his growing fame. In the press release announcing his departure, Hodgson noted: "I think it was Adam West who once said that if you stay in the same costume too long, you eventually find yourself signing autographs at the R.V. show." Nelson, who had been the show's head writer for four years and who had made numerous guest appearances on the show, was the logical choice to replace Hodgson.*

Q: I've seen people refer to BBI and **Best Brains**. What are they?

A: ***Best Brains, Inc.,*** *is the name of the company, founded by Joel and producer Jim Mallon, that produces the show. It is often called BBI for short. It is located in a non-descript office park in Eden Prairie, MN, a suburb of Minneapolis.*

Q: Who does what on the show?

A: *Trace Beaulieu plays Dr. F and does the voice and puppetry for Crow. Kevin Murphy does the voice and puppetry for Tom Servo. Jim Mallon does the voice and puppetry for Gypsy. Frank Conniff plays TV's Frank.*

Q: Who or what is Magic Voice?

A: *This has never been adequately explained, but she appears to be the voice of the ship's computer. At various times her voice has been provided by Jann Johnson and Alexandra Carr. It is currently being provided by Mary Jo Pehl.*

Q: How did the show come to be called **Mystery Science Theater 3000**?

A: *Jim Mallon said in an interview on CompuServe, "When the show was to debut on KTMA we didn't have a title. So I said to Joel 'what do you think?' And without blinking he said* ***Mystery Science Theater 2000****. But since we were so close to the year 2000 we decided to shift it up one thousand years.' The show does not take place in the year 3000.*

Q: Mike Nelson looks familiar. Where have I seen him before?

A: *Before taking over as host, Mike Nelson was already known to viewers for his special guest appearances as Jack Perkins, Michael Feinstein, Gamera, Mothra, Morressey, Torgo and any number of hexfield viewscreen guests.*

Q: What is Gizmonic Institute?

A: *Gizmonic was the top-secret research lab where Dr. F. worked as a scientist and where Joel worked as a janitor. The corporate culture of Gizmonic revolved around inventing. Everyone who worked there, including the janitors, were inventors. In fact, one of the reasons Dr. F chose Joel to send into space was because Dr. F resented the fact that Joel was a better inventor. During the KTMA episodes, Dr. F spoke to Joel from a lab in Gizmonic. But the inside of Gizmonic has never been shown on the regular series.*

Q: What is Deep 13?

A: *It's a cavernous underground lair, located deep in the sub-basement of Gizmonic Institute, near the atomic pile. In episode 101, fearing his rogue experiment would be discovered by the management of Gizmonic, Dr. F fled to Deep 13, and there continues his work.*

Q: Why does Gypsy talk that way? Is she stupid? And why doesn't she watch the movies with M&TB?

A: *Gypsy is probably the most sophisticated robot on the ship. She is responsible*

for controlling all the "higher functions" of the ship so that M&TB can watch the movies without worrying about it. She talks that way because all of her brain power is being used up in controlling the ship, and she has very little left over for normal conversation. In 207 "Wild Rebels" she shut down most of the ship's functions for a little while in order to have a regular conversation, and she spoke perfectly normal. She does not watch the movies, again, because she is busy elsewhere.

Q: Can Gypsy enter the theater?

A: *Yes. Gypsy has entered the theater in 3 episodes, including 112 "Untamed Youth" and 207 "Wild Rebels". She even participated in the first part of the experiment in 412 "Hercules and the Captive Women."*

Q: Why do we never see Cambot?

A: *Because we are seeing the proceedings through his eyes. We can only see him if he looks into a mirror (as he does in the opening).*

Q: What's this I hear about an **MST3K** movie?

A: *BBI has plans to make an MST3K full-length film. The movie will be similar to the TV show. The host segments will probably be a bit longer and more elaborate, but the major part of the film will still be in the theater. Mike Nelson will star in it (not Joel). Universal studios has the option to make the MST3K movie, but it has not seemed very eager. BBI may end up making it independently.*

Q: What is the history of the show?

A: *Joel first pitched the idea of the show in early 1988 to Jim Mallon, who was then working at a small independent UHF TV station in Minneapolis, KTMA-TV, channel 23. Joel made a demo tape of the concept with the help of struggling local stand-up comic Trace Beaulieu and high-schooler and budding comedian Josh Weinstein. Helping out behind the scenes was KTMA semi-employee Kevin Murphy. The first two episodes of MST3K aired back-to-back on Thanksgiving Day, November 24, 1988, and were watched by only a few thousand people (only a few of whom "got" it.) The station payed the group $200 per show: Joel got $50, Trace and Josh got $25 each and the rest went to props. Joel did a total of 22 shows for KTMA, before, in 1989, selling it to the old Comedy Channel cable network. When they sold the series to the Comedy Channel, Mallon and Murphy quit KTMA, and with Hodgson, Beaulieu and Weinstein founded Best Brains.*

They did 13 shows in the first season, and, after a nervous period of waiting, were renewed for another 13-show season. In the middle of the second season, the Comedy Channel and its rival, Ha!, merged to (eventually) become Comedy Central. The series has run on Comedy Central ever since and is currently in its 6th season. Seasons 3 through 6 have each had 24 episodes.

Q: I've heard several stories about the fate of the original masters of the KTMA episodes. What happened to them?

A: *A popular rumor was that they languished in storage room at KTMA for years, and then, when the station was sold, the masters were bulk erased by the new management. But staffers inside BBI have since confirmed that they are safe and sound and in the hands of Jim Mallon.*

Q: I understand there was another cast change beside's Joel's departure. What was the change, and when did it happen?

A: *The only other major change came when Josh Weinstein left the show after the end of season 1. At the beginning of the first episode of the second season (episode 201-Rocketship XM), Joel is seen installing a "new voice" in Tom Servo—this marks the beginning of Kevin Murphy providing voice and puppetry for the mighty-voiced bot, replacing Weinstein. In the same episode, Weinstein's Dr. Erhardt character was written out of the show and a new resident of Deep 13 was introduced: Frank—later to be known as TV's Frank. Asked by Joel of Dr. Erhardt's whereabouts, Frank simply held up a milk carton with Weinstein's picture on it and announced "He's missing." He was never heard from again, except for a riff during "Earth Vs. The Spider," when a character vaguely resembling him was eaten by the giant spider, prompting Joel to note "So THAT'S what happened to Dr. Erhardt!" Weinstein as Servo used a deep, profundo voice, so as to not to be confused with the high-pitched, squeaky voice he used as Dr. Erhardt, although the two mixed somewhat. Kevin appears to have tried to imitate Josh in the early going, before settling down to the Tom voice we have all come to know and love.*

Q. Is it true about Frank?

A. *Sadly, yes. Frank Conniff, who plays TV's Frank, will be leaving the series at the end of the sixth season. He is off to Hollywood to become a star. We have no word about who or what his replacement will be.*

Q: Why did he decide to leave the show?

A: *Partly to avoid typecasting, and partly to find new challenges. After portraying "TV's Frank" for five seasons, he decided that it was time to move on and seek his fortune. We can only wish him the best of luck.*

Q: What were the episodes done for KTMA like?

A: *They are barely recognizable as the forerunners of the current series. Little or no writing was done ahead of time, and most of the riffs in the theater were ad-libbed at the spur of the moment. This meant that sometimes they were brilliant, sometimes they were deadly stupid, sometimes they were pointless and many times there were LONG stretches of silence. Physically, J&TB were far smaller in the theater, there were many more seats, and they were stuck waaay over on the right hand side of the screen.*

Crow was a bit more crudely made, Servo was silver and Gypsy looked like she was made from an erector set. In the very first episode, Servo was called "Beeper" and looked a bit different. He also spoke in annoying beeps (hence the name) that only Crow could understand. However, Josh wanted to have a larger speaking role in the show, so Beeper gained a voice and was renamed.

Q: Why won't Comedy Central run the KTMA and 1st season episodes?

A: *First, you need to understand that Comedy Central has no control over this. Best Brains does not work for Comedy Central and Comedy Central cannot make Best Brains do anything they don't want to do. It is Best Brains' decision not to run them, for various reasons. One reason is legality: KTMA never really secured the proper rights for the movies that J&TB used—they just riffed on whatever the Sunday evening movie was. So even if they wanted to show them, it would be illegal. There are also rights problems with some of the 1st season episodes—they DID secure the rights for those, but in some cases they have since expired.*

But even if the rights weren't the problem, there is a second reason why Best Brains doesn't want to see them aired: Quality—or rather the lack thereof. It is the opinion of Best Brains that the 1st season shows, even if the rights ARE up to date, are not up to the level of the later

shows. "It's a bit like if someone asked to see the work you did in kindergarten," Jim Mallon explained recently. Many fans disagree with Mallon's assessment, but nonetheless respect the decision.

Q: Is there any way I can get copies of those early shows?

A: *Many people have copies of the first season episodes. Posting notes on computer bulletin boards about the show usually brings a response from some helpful MSTie. The KTMA's are harder to come by, and the copies I've seen are mostly barely watchable 50th generation dupes. But they are out there to be had if one is dogged enough.*

Q: I'm building robots. Where can I find parts?

A: *Wherever you can find them! Tom Servo's gumball head can be found at Mr. Bulky's or other candy shops around the country. You might want to look for various items at Everything's A Dollar store where everything's a dollar (price check, Bill!). Another great place to look is in various thrift stores around town. Also, foam tubing and drainage tubing can be found at most home-improvement stores like Builders Square. However, certain items are so hard to find that Best Brains must create more copies by using molds of the originals. These items are:*

Tom Servo: *His torso, including both the barrel bank and the engine block. In the words of Jef Maynard, Toolmaster of Best Brains and builder of most of the props, the bank is "about as rare as kryptonite." Tom's hands are also impossible to find.*

Crow: *The soapdish around his eyes is another extremely rare item, so rare that Best Brains themselves only have one copy of the original. Also, Crow's main body is hard to find as that Tupperware set is no longer made. The Floralier set is the one part of all of the Bots' parts that Jef Maynard cannot make a copy of, so if you own a Tupperware Floralier then Jef may be very interested in hearing from you!*

Q: What is the Mads' keyboard made out of?

A: *A teletype.*

Q: Is there an MST3K fan club?

A: *Yes, it is run by BBI. Just send your name and address to: MST3K Information Club, P.O. Box 5325, Hopkins, Minnesota 55343*

Alternately, you can email Julie Walker, Info Club Liason, at juliewa@aol.com. It's free to join.

Q: What do you get when you join the club?

A: *You will receive your official MST3K fan club card, attached to a flyer. Your membership number is printed at the bottom left of the address label. The flyer entices you to buy MST3K merchandise, including t-shirts and the Life Survival Kit (a fan club kit). You are also put on the MST3K mailing list and receive a lifetime subscription to the MST3K "Satellite News" and receive updates on Best Brains activities such as live appearances and special events.*

Q: Do I have to order a fan club kit to stay in the club?

A: *No. The club is free. The newsletters, postcards and flyers are sent to you free of charge.*

Q: Where is the membership number?

A: *It is in the lower left corner of the mailing label for the first item you receive from them. It is currently above 50,000.*

Q: I've heard and read a lot about the MST3K convention that was held in September of '94. Will there be another one in '95?

A: *No, the next one is scheduled for 1996. Best Brains has said they expect the next one to be much larger and feels it will take at least that long to organize it.*

Q: What happened at the convention?

A: *It was glorious. About 2,000 MSTies from around the country gathered at the Raddison South hotel in Bloomington, MN. The line to get into the (too small) merchandise room was endless but its inhabitants utterly cheerful. One room at the hotel featured a "museum" of famous props from the series. Episodes were run in two different rooms 24 hours a day—and the showings of "Manos: The Hands of Fate" were standing room only. The Friday night keynote speech featured the entire cast and several members of the writing staff discussing the early days of the show, showing slides and answering (far too few) questions from the audience. On Saturday, an autograph session scheduled for two hours stretched to over four. That was followed by a celebrity session featuring Bev-*

"Bots Are Made of These"

MST3K Robot Part List

Crow

The ever wise-cracking Crow is mostly made of sporting equipment and Tupperware.

Eyes: glow-in-the dark ping-pong balls; pupils are square bits of electrical tape.

Head: Crow's head (around his eyes) is a comprised of a soap dish that is no longer made and is extremely difficult to find. The top of his head is a lacrosse mask (Cooper XL7FG).

Mouth: A plastic bowling pin cut in half forms Crow's mouth. It has a circular emblem with what appears to be a stylized lower-case "e" imprinted in it.

Arms: Adjustable desk lamp parts, with closed-cell foam tubing (the kind used to insulate water pipes) on the upper part of the arms. Popeet toys are also used on part of upper arm. Crow's hands are simple forks.

Neck: a Popeet toy.

Torso: A set of Tupperware from a set called "Floralier" plus part of another set make up Crow's torso. Two trays, face to face, make his shoulders and the vases are below, turned upside down. A short section of drainage hose separates the two trays.

Legs: more lamp parts.

The head (save eyes) and torso is then spray-painted gold over its original plastic. ❑

Tom Servo

Though Tom will never admit it, he is comprised mostly of various toys.

Head: A gumball machine made by *Carousel Industries* serves as Tom's head. (The name for it is *Executive Snack Dispenser*.) Tom's beak is spray-painted silver after the manual dispenser handle is removed. Also, there is an added extension (made from the lid of another snack dispenser) between the top of his beak and the bottom of his globe.

Torso: A *Money Lover's Barrel Bank* forms the torso (This is a very difficult item to find). The chest is a toy engine block (Both items are now made from a mold).

Shoulders: Eveready flashlight heads make up Tom's shoulders.

Arms: An arm assembly from a *Mr. Moonie* doll. Once all the rage, it is now fairly difficult to find. This doll would drop its pants and "moon" people when a rubber bladder was squeezed. The entire assembly, including the rubber bladder, is kept intact when installed into the barrel.

Hands: Another rare set of items, doll hands (that are now made from a mold).

Hoverskirt: A plastic Halloween "*Boo Bowl*." Base is made of foam tubing. Black decorations are made from plastic that has been vacu-formed around a toy train. ❑

Gypsy

Gypsy was constructed from a wide variety of common household items.

Eye: An Eveready flashlight, minus the hood forms Gypsy's cylops-like eye.

Head: A *Century Infant Love Seat* (No longer manufactured) forms the basis for Gypsy's head. The top of the head is the outside of the seat turned upside down. The lower part is made from the inner liner of the seat and is connected to the top by a PVC tube.

Neck: Gypsy's long, giraffe-style neck was formed around a hose "drain tile."

Lips: The lip (rim) of the babyseat is lined with foam tubing to create Gypsy's lips.

The original Gypsy from KTMA TV23 was made of parts which became part of Comedy Channel's Cambot, but both robots have been revised since then. ❑

Cambot

Cambot is rarely seen except in the opening sequence of MST3K (via a mirror). This elusive bot has had many faces and configurations. Season 1: Some sort of metal part. Sphere in middle. Episodes 201-512: Rotating alarm light on top. Neck is some sort of hose, a la Gypsy. Episodes 513-on: Eyelike sphere with lens in center. ❑

erly Garland (star of three MSTed movies), David Worth (director of "Warrior of the Lost World") and John Humphries (the guy who played Mikey in "Teenage Strangler"). Kim Catrall (of "City Limits" fame) was also scheduled to attend but canceled (sob!) at the last minute. Studio tours went on all day Saturday. On Saturday night, the entire convention was bused to a theater in downtown Minneapolis for a live performance of the show, featuring the movie "This Island Earth." There were standing ovations beyond count and deafening cheers rattled the hall. Following the show, conventioneers returned to the hotel for a gala costume ball that extended well into the wee hours and where MSTies and cast members mingled freely. It was a bleary and blissful 2,000 MSTies that stumbled to the airport on Sunday.

Q: What is "Keep Circulating The Tapes"?

A: *At the end of the episode, MST3K has a line in the credits to "Keep Circulating The Tapes." When MST3K first started, BBI encouraged people to copy episodes to show to friends, as CC is not available in all areas. Beginning with the fifth season, the tag line does not appear anymore, apparently at the suggestion of BBI's lawyers. BBI still allows copying of the show for private use, however.*

Q: So how come they don't do "Plan 9 From Outer Space" which is touted the worst movie of all?

A: *Best Brains has said that they do not want to do this movie for two reasons. First, the voice-over from Criswell would interfere with the commenting that Mike and the 'bots would make. Second, the movie already pokes fun at itself. In addition, while "Plan 9" certainly is awful, MSTies know better. MST3K has unearthed several cinematic train wrecks that make it look like "Citizen Kane."*

Q: Just what IS a hamdinger?

A: *Hamdingers are miniature microwavable hamburgers made out of processed ham. Originally intended to be a quickie snack-meal item, they tasted so bad that most wound up being used as chum, or fish bait.*

Q: Where have I heard "Satellite of Love" before?

A: *The Jerry Lewis Telethon people call the satellite which receives their signal the "Satellite of Love." It is also the title of a song recorded by Lou Reed on his 1973 "Transformer" album.*

Q: Why are the Mole People (the Mads' assistants) named Jerry and Sylvia?

A: *The names are taken from Gerry and Sylvia Anderson, who created many supermarionation films such as "Thunderbirds Are Go."*

Q. How come the Mole People are no longer on the show?

A: *At the convention, it was revealed that the Mole People costumes were horribly hot under the studio lights, and the interns who were inside of them revolted and refused to continue the characters, for fear of asphyxiation.*

Q: Who is Torgo, and why does he keep showing up with that annoying theme music?

A: *Torgo is the "monster" from 424 "Manos: The Hands of Fate."*

Q: Which way do the 'bots face when in the theater? It looks like Crow is actually facing away from the screen.

A: *The 'bots, in addition to Mike and Joel, face toward the screen, with their backs to Cambot and thus the audience. What you are seeing is an optical illusion that many people have reported seeing.*

Q: Who is this Richard Basehart that Gypsy is so fond of?

A: *He is a long-time movie and TV character actor, best known as the star of the 1960's TV series "Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea." The Richard Basehart thing is basically a running gag that was started in episode 101 when Joel asked Gypsy what 2+2 was. She responded "Richard Basehart." You kinda had to be there.*

Q: Why is Tom Servo's head look like a cylinder in several episodes of the Comedy Channel's 1990/91 season?

A: *Servo was given a "haircut" in episode 205 "Rocket Attack USA."*

Q: We have seen that Servo gets around by use of his hoverskirt. Why does he need to be carried in the theater by Mike or Joel?

A: *In episode 110 "Robot Holocaust" Servo reminds Joel to carry him over the heating grid. Mike is also informed of this fact in 513 "The Brain That Wouldn't Die." Apparently Servo's hoverskirt has difficulty providing enough force to carry him over on his own, although he has done it on occasion.*

The show-production reason for this is that when they enter the theater, Mike can walk in, and Trace can slide Crow over from the right, but Kevin must be already sitting down under where Tom Servo sits. Mike has to carry Tom Servo in and hand him to Kevin Murphy, and carry him out at the end.

Q: How does Tom Servo know when it is time to leave the theater?

A: *Because he was built with those "special parts" (see "Song Lyrics") that tell the time.*

Q: Why can't we see through Tom Servo's head in the theater?

A: *Puppet doubles are used for filming the theater segments for the show. These doubles are painted black (such as the evil dark specter "Timmy" in show 416 "Firemaidens from Outer Space"). The doubles make better outlines for the final mix and don't glare back at the camera.*

Q: Was Servo's head always painted black?

A: *No. In the KTMA episodes, the original 'bots played their own parts in the theater segments, not stand-ins. Therefore the movie could be seen through Servo's head then.*

Q: Sometimes Tom Servo's hands are flesh colored and sometimes they are white. Why?

A: *They are created from a mold using the same plastic as hearing aids are made from. Sometimes Best Brains forgets to paint them.*

Q: How many times has Servo's head exploded?

A: *As far as we can tell, 5 (not counting when everyone blew up in 406 "Attack of the Giant Leeches" during "We're a Danger to Ourselves and Others" song). Tom's head first exploded trying to think of a good thing about 105 "The Corpse Vanishes". In 107 "Robot Monster" it was figuring out how bumblebees fly. In 211 "First Spaceship on Venus" his sarcasm sequencer overloaded. In 318 "Star Force: Fugitive Alien II" his head came apart completely. And in 419 "Rebel Set" it was thinking about Merritt Stone.*

Q: How many times has Cambot actively participated in the show?

A: *Three, not counting his frequent musical accompaniment. In 202 "Sidehackers" he put up an ESPN-type scorecard. In 301 "Cave Dwellers" he helped Joel redo the opening credits. In 423 "Bride of the Monster" he re-edited the final scene.*

Q: Why, in the opening credits of episodes 201-512, when Cambot looks at himself in the mirror and pans left, the image on the set DOESN'T?

A: *It's just a show, you should really just relax.*

Q: I like the comedy, but many times the movie is SO bad, even the jokes don't save it, and I just can't take it. I wish they would do a GOOD movie.

A: *You, too, have failed to grasp the point of the show, though your aesthetic tastes are admirable. The idea is that Dr. F is supposed to be torturing Mike to see how it affects his mind. A good movie would not be torture. Some have argued over the years that if they were good enough writers, they wouldn't need a bad movie, they COULD do a good one. That's probably true, but a bad movie gives the writers much more to work with.*

Q: I notice that the "invention exchange" that used to start each show is no longer happening? Why has it stopped?

A: *There is both an "on camera" reason and an "off camera" reason.*

On camera: as explained earlier, the corporate culture of Gizmonic Institute revolved around inventions. So much so that, rather than greet each other, Gizmonic employees that met would show each other their latest invention. Since both Dr. F and Joel were Gizmonic employees, that was the first thing they did each episode. But Mike never worked for Gizmonic (he was a temp hired directly by Dr. F. well after they fled Gizmonic) so he really wasn't steeped in the culture, and Dr. F would see no need to exchange inventions.

Off camera: the invention exchanges were mostly Joel's doing. He was the gizmo guy. When he left, there was no interest in continuing the concept. Instead, Dr. F begins each episode by performing an experiment on M&TB.

Q: Since Mike took over, it seems like the host segments don't having anything to do with movie anymore/It seems like the host segments always have something to do with the movie. Why?

A: *It's funny the way people's memories work. Those who prefer one kind of host segment over the other seem to sense more of the kind they dislike since Mike's arrival as host—and each group has complained that this is the case, when a careful examination of the series shows that the ratio of relevant-to-irrelevant host segments has remained pretty much the same over the years. Weird, huh?*

Q: Why is Frank listed in the credits as "TV's" Frank?

A: *Originally, it was just Frank. As time went on, however, Frank adopted the name "TV's" Frank, similar to hosts of older TV shows where the host would buddy up to the viewer. When a TV personality became big, he would be introduced as "TV's" so-and-so.*

Q: Why does Mike (and Joel) watch these bombs? What would happen if he refused to enter the theater?

A: *In 208 "Lost Continent" Joel refuses to enter the theater, and is zapped by remote control by the Mads.*

Q: What is "Hi-keeba!" and where does it come from?

A: *It comes from episode 104 "Women of the Prehistoric Planet". A character in the film is trying to show off his martial arts skill, so he shouts "Hi-keeba!" and promptly hits himself in the head.*

Q: It seems to me that this sort of thing has been done before. Has it?

A: *Well, the concept of commenting humorously on some tedious presentation goes back at least to Shakespeare, and probably a lot further. In recent years we've seen a number of similar concepts. In the 1960s, Woody Allen did a movie called "What's Up Tiger Lily?" in which he threw out the soundtrack of a horrible Japanese spy movie and dubbed in his own satirical soundtrack. That same concept was used in the 1980s for a syndicated series called "Mad Movies with the L.A. Connection." There are reports of underground comedy teams in San Francisco and Los Angeles in the late 1960s who experimented with humorous commentary of movies, etc. Of course, the "Rocky Horror Picture Show" phenomenon should be mentioned. And from around the country, viewers report that the hosts of local-station "Monster Chiller Horror Theater" type shows would often mock the movies they were showing in one way or another, sometimes while the movie was playing, though never quite in the way MST3K does, and certainly not with as much success.*

Q: What IS it about this show?

A: *Well, Joel put it best in an interview in 1990: "It's about liberty, in a small, goofy way," he said. And that is probably at the heart of it. It appeals to the American independent spirit, and especially the quintessentially American passion for standing up and yelling "This stinks!"*

But beyond that, there is no mistaking the genius behind the show. It shines so clearly that toddlers are drawn to it and senior citizens nod in quiet respect—even if neither gets the Kurt Cobain jokes. The show has a cool elegance, an endearing offkilter brilliance that engenders an astonishing loyalty in its viewers. It is among the most unpredictable shows on national TV and yet it is also one of the most reassuringly formulaic. In the theater, the give-and-take rhythm between movie and commentary can be dazzling and hypnotic. While the host segments often build to the kind of antic cartoon chaos (reminiscent of Monty Python or Bugs Bunny) that is a tonic for anyone who feels trapped in a dreary, predictable workaday world. The overall result is an entertainment experience that leaves its viewer a little happier than when he found it. MST3K won't run forever. But it should.

Credits

The following is a list of all the people who have sent along information, notes, and general ideas to all the various versions of these FAQs, going back to the beginning. What they wrote or suggested may no longer be included here, but they still deserve mention. They are Jennie Andreasen, David Arnold, Paul "Monty" Ashley, Malcolm Austin, Gregory, S. Bandy, Keith Barrett, Cindy Bell, David J. Bianco, Jeremy Billones, A: Wright, Blan, Joseph Cadotte, Mark Carson, Erin Cash, Cliff Chaput, Kevin Cheek, Richard Clark, Stephanie M. Clarkson-Aines, Terri Clendenin, Mike Cohen, Chris Cooley, Jason Corley, Donald Cotnoir-Strong, Scott Crabtree, Kevin Days, Markus De Shon, Rob DeMillo, Patrick Delahanty, Bill Dennen, Scott Dexter, Matt Duhan, Brian Dunkle, Lorenzo Ellis, Nina Eppes, Scott M. Fabbri, Anthony Fiarito, Patrick Fitzgerald, Lynn-Anne Friese, Greg Galcik, Pat Gomes, John Gotts, Jamie Green, Gerald M. Guglielmo, Andrew Hannah, William Harrison, Larry Hastings, Ron Hitchens, Marty Hoff, Dale Holod, Mark Holtz, Charles R. Hoynowski, Ed Hughes, Jonathan Hughes, Mike Inglis, Chad Jackson, Lisa Jenkins, Brian Johnson, Mary Lynn Johnson, Todd Johnson, Chuck Jordan, Norman Joseph, Brad Keely, Ed Klein, Johnny Klonaris, R'ykandar Korra'ti, Rich Kulawiec, Donna K. Lang, Bob Linehan, Lorrie Matheson, Chris McCullough, Mark Meyer, Will Morgan, Phil Mueller, Kevin Murray, Frank G. Neves, Michael K. Neylon, Synth F. Oberheim, Mark Odell, Mary Pat, Brian Perler, Marc Peters, Kevin Podsiadlik, Lon Ponschock, Joshua R. Poulson, Ed Powell, Ellen Sasse, Joel A: Schenkenberg, Jeff Shapuras, William Sherman, John D. Shull, Brian Siano, Will Silver, Steve Simmons, Sarah Skovronsky, Mike Slusher, Dave Spensley, "The Punster," "Tazer One," Paul Thrasher, Chuck Tomasi, Lance Visser, Julie Walker, Monty Wilson, Tom Wilson, Patty Winter, Kate Wrightson, Michael J. Zavisca...And many other MiSTies from coast to coast.

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The Spark Before the Flame

Role-Playing in the Time Before "Star Wars: A New Hope"

By Sean Patrick Fannon © 1995
Illustrated by Matt Wilson and Richard E. Emond © 1995

The hull echoed with the dull whump-whump of blaster fire impacting from below. The COMPNOR agents and CompForce troopers weren't giving up easy, and even though the Blackjack's structure could take it, Jax didn't like the idea of having to explain the scorch marks at his next port of call. He banked hard to throw off their aim and then pointed the ship for a vector that would quickly take them all out of the atmosphere. Trillia whistled nervously from the co-pilot's seat as she called up the nav-comp board.

"Any idea where I should program for, Jax?"

"Don't ask me. Seems our 'client' should be the one telling you that." He nodded back towards the passenger section, where a rather motley bunch had gathered and were warily eyeing each other.

Through a set of circumstances that Jax was sure he would never completely figure out, he had managed to take on three local police officers (one of whom seemed to be a Jedi, or at least someone with delusions and a lightsaber), a semi-famous galactic reporter and his kid, a droid, a rogue Naval cadet, and a fully armed and armored bounty hunter. Oh, of course, there was also "Mouse" Temple, his 'client.'

Trillia called back to the passenger hold. "How about it, Mouse? Where are we going?"

The small, nervous con artist made his way to the cockpit door and looked meekly at Jax before responding in a small voice. "Oh, heh heh. Um, well, as to that . . ."

Jax was quickly losing what little patience he had. "Out with it, Mouse! I have to burn my way out of a Republic supply port with blaster-happy soldiers and Security Bureau agents ready to kill me, I have a hold full of people who might do it for them and take each other out to boot, and not even the advance you promised me to show for it! What the hell is going on?"

"No need to be so . . . abrupt, Jax. We've been friends too long for that now, haven't we?"

"I am not your friend! I have never been your friend, and if you don't tell me what's going on right now, you're going to wish you'd never even—"

Trillia's shout interrupted the freighter captain's threat.

"Jax, we have got real troubles. Two corvettes are on intercept vectors towards our position!"

Jax grabbed the small man and slammed him harshly against the bulkhead. "What's going ON!?! Who is this mysterious passenger we never picked up that's gotten me and my ship placed on the Most Wanted list?"

Mouse struggled to regain his composure and failed. He trembled violently as sweat poured down his forehead and cheeks. "M-M-Mon Mothma! Senator Mon Mothma! She's wanted for treason by Emperor Palpatine, and I was supposed to help her get to the Outer Rim."

Jax dropped Mouse on the deck and shook his head. "Emperor? I knew Palpatine was elected President, but Emperor? What are you—"

At that point, the Blackjack lurched wildly as capital-class blasters opened up from behind. The corvettes had caught up and were asking no questions before they fired. Jax leapt into the pilot's chair and began evasive maneuvers.

"Snake's Den, Tril. We're going to Snake's Den. After that, I don't know. But I'm from Chandrila, and if Mon Mothma is in trouble, then Jax Keyn will get her out of it . . ."

Problems With A Star Wars Campaign

One of the more interesting problems with running games set in the Star Wars universe (and, in fact, in many "established" environments) is that of making sure that the players feel that their characters' presence and actions are relevant. This is particularly evident if the game is set during the period of the three movies.

This phenomenon, as many GMs and players have shared with me, stems from the fact that most of the truly important events of that time period are accounted for and occurred "on-screen" with the well-known heroes. It seems as though anything the Player Characters might accomplish during that time is merely support for the actions of the "true" heroes; there's no way the PCs can attain true eminence, which can be very important in such an "epic" oriented environment as that of the Star Wars universe.

One of the alternatives is to set the campaign in the aftermath of the movies, during which time the New Republic is established. The "end" of this sort of campaign is not truly known, although there are quite a lot of sources out there that provide information about this period. Most of these sources are the widely-known novels, including those by Timothy Zahn and Kevin J. Anderson, as well as the popular Dark Horse Comics series, "Dark Empire." Again, the problem exists that the "real heroes" are already known, and it can be difficult to create a sense of preeminence for the player characters. Additionally, the "good guys" are more or less on top during the periods when Luke, Leia, and Han aren't saving the Republic.

Another possibility, however, is to set the campaign before the first movie. Not so far back as before the Clone Wars, because there is little to nothing known or published about that time (sources indicate that this is intentional, since much of the next series of

movies are likely to focus on this era). There is, however, a period of chaos and darkness, fraught with adventure, that can serve as an exciting setting for a group of player characters. The period begins around the time that Luke Skywalker and Leia Organa are born (roughly eighteen years prior to the beginning of "A New Hope"), thus allowing for other heroes to shine and help drive the course of events without fear of being overshadowed.

This time frame falls in the period where Senator Palpatine is maneuvering to be elected President, and then declares himself Emperor. It is a time of intense political intrigue and dark destinies, when the Old Republic finds itself crumbling and the New Order is arising.

One might think that this makes for a very depressing period in which to be heroes. Remember, however, that this is the time that heroes are most needed. The Rebellion had to start somewhere, and it took people of exceptional courage and ability to fan the flames that would eventually lead to the Rebel Alliance. Many individuals came together to oppose the newly-formed Empire at every turn; how else was it possible that the Empire didn't simply sweep through the galaxy and win without a fight?

The player characters can be one of those groups, brought together by circumstance and mutual need, struggling to survive and keep the New Order from destroying everything they cherish and believe in.

From Bad To Worse

Note that much of this information is gleaned from the ***STAR WARS, THE ROLE PLAYING GAME (Second Edition), THE STAR WARS IMPERIAL SOURCEBOOK,*** *and* ***THE STAR WARS REBEL ALLIANCE SOURCEBOOK,*** *all published by* West End Games. *Also utilized is* ***A GUIDE TO THE STAR WARS UNIVERSE (Second Edition),*** *written by Bill Slavicsek and published by* Ballantine.

The story of the Old Republic is a classic one; a tale of absolute power corrupting absolutely. When one observes that something is too perfect, they are usually right.

The Old Republic had lasted for literally ages (the source materials that relate this are intentionally vague, mostly due to the need to keep this material open for future projects). It was brought into being over 25,000 years before the Battle of Yavin and the destruction of the first Death Star took place. A mostly benevolent and effective government saw to the ruling of millions of inhabited worlds, but ultimately this bureaucracy grew too large and too unmanageable. Various Senators began to see opportunity for personal gain and to obtain power bases.

Shortly after the end of the Clone Wars, when the Old Republic and the Jedi Knights were at their weakest, the first major cracks in the structure appeared. Dozens of factions began to form, each struggling to attain its own goals at the expense of the others, as well as the very Republic itself. Entire systems fell into dark terror as their leaders betrayed the trust the people had placed in them, and the very fractured nature of the bureaucracy caused it to become more and more paralyzed, unable to act against these atrocities. Various portions of the Republic military came under the sway of the extraordinarily powerful Senators. All that stood between the Republic and total chaos were the Jedi Knights; unfortunately, they had been decimated by the Clone Wars and were unable to effectively oppose the machinations of the various corrupt Senators.

Although there were many different factions, there came to be essentially two camps within the Senate and its bureaucracy; those who wanted to go on exploiting their wealth and power, and those who desperately wished to repair the damage done to the Republic. Both camps realized, however, that the Republic was in danger of completely collapsing. That's when the mild-mannered, quietly intelligent and charismatic Senator Palpatine stepped in.

Palpatine had done an admirable job of presenting himself in a favorable light to almost everyone; the corrupt saw him as an easy dupe, and the reformists saw him as their means to accomplish their agenda. When it was finally decided that a new Senatorial President needed to be elected (it is unclear whether or not there was one already in place; it is easy enough to assume that one existed but was deemed completely ineffectual), Palpatine was the candidate of choice. He was elected by a landslide.

A Closer Look

What follows is an extrapolation from the sources above and is one interpretation of the sequence of events.

During the latter part of Palpatine's reign as a Senator, he helped to outline the idea of the "New Order," a political philosophy designed around the idea of "cleaning out" the garbage and the waste that was the current Republic and creating a more efficient and better-run government. In fact, Palpatine was the instigator of the New Order idea, but he was shrewd and patient enough to let many others take the credit and glory, especially Crueya Vandron. He happily remained in the background, advising and suggesting, but always avoiding showing a direct leadership.

Shortly before Palpatine was elected President, the Commission for the Preservation of the New Order (COMPNOR) made its presence known as an active and steadily-growing political party. Its most visible figurehead was Crueya, who had become a close and per-

sonal friend to Palpatine. When Palpatine was elected, COMPNOR announced their full support of the new President and his ideals.

Like the Communist Party in Stalin's Russia and the Nazi Party in Hitler's Germany, COMPNOR became an increasingly powerful and pervasive influence in the government. Over an amazingly short amount of time, there was little that COMPNOR wasn't involved in, and anyone who wanted to remain in good standing joined the party. Somehow, Palpatine managed to maintain his distance from the direct workings of COMPNOR; he was even able to present himself to various factions as an outsider who was simply bending to the wishes of "the people."

There was no doubt to those who were "in the know," however, that Palpatine was the undisputed master of the COMPNOR organization. The mysterious Select Committee, once a large "social club" of political and intellectual elitists that formed the leadership of the party, changed drastically over the first year of Palpatine's presidency. It became a shadowy, dangerous force that answered to no one save Palpatine, and its activities were centered solely upon consolidating Palpatine's power.

One organization that Palpatine didn't have to subvert was that which became Imperial Intelligence. As the Old Republic was dying, the leaders of four different intelligence and security agencies got together to decide what should be done. They realized that their resources and agents were being misused terribly by corrupt Senators and bureaucrats, and that the government they served was quickly approaching dissolution. Rather than join in the infighting and aid the process of anarchy, they united and pooled their resources. They also made it clear to Palpatine that his idea of the New Order was a sound one as far as they were concerned. Thus, Palpatine practically had the Empire handed to him.

Shortly after this, Palpatine declared that the New Order was a reality, that COMPNOR was the Grand Bureaucracy that would operate that New Order, and that he would lead the millions of worlds under his rule to glory . . . as their Emperor.

Not So Fast

Even though the Senate found itself with the appellation "Imperial" attached, there were still many who resisted the whole idea. Sadly, they were outnumbered and largely ineffectual. The damage was done, and with the support of the military and security agencies, the influence of the COMPNOR party, and the backing of too many Senators who saw this as their shining opportunity to further exploit available resources and gain power, it looked as though all hope for a restored Republic was lost.

However, such Senators as Mon Mothma of Chandrila, Garm Bel Iblis of Corellia, and Bail Organa of Alderaan still had enough influence to keep the Senate from completely collapsing into nothing more than a puppet organization for COMPNOR to manipulate. Garm left the Senate floor in protest the day that Palpatine made his declaration and was not seen amongst the Senate again until the formation of the New Republic. Bail Organa attempted to mediate from within, to show patience and moderation (all to no avail), and Mon Mothma spoke out loudly against this New Order and its depredations. Eventually, Mon Mothma was branded a traitor and Imperial Security Bureau agents (COMPNOR's equivalent of the Gestapo) were dispatched to arrest her. Bail Organa, maintaining the pretense of siding with the New Order, secretly aided her escape, and what was to become the Rebellion was born...

A Time For Heroes

It is recommended that a GM begin their campaign roughly around the time that Palpatine declares himself Emperor. This is around the time that Luke and Leia Skywalker are born and hidden away by Obi-Wan Kenobi, about eighteen years prior to the events of *A New Hope*.

This is a very chaotic and tumultuous time, and this fact should be emphasized to the players. Their characters are operating in a sea of uncertainty as vast and sweeping changes are taking place. Names, buildings, and uniforms are changing, replacing the appellations and trappings of the Republic with that of the Empire. Soldiers and pilots are discovering that they are now considered Imperials. Policies and procedures are undergoing sweeping adjustments and whole-cloth changes, throwing everything into temporary chaos in the process.

It is also important to emphasize that these changes are hardly for the better, at least as far as individual rights and liberties are concerned. Customs policies will find freighter captains facing stiff fines and even impoundments for infractions they didn't know existed. The media will experience a rapid "blackout" and stringent restrictions. Military personnel will be asked to do things they would have never dreamed of, committing atrocities under the watchful eyes of COMPNOR "observers." Local law enforcement officers will find that they are being supplanted by "party-approved" operatives.

In working through each character's "back-story," it will be important to create the motivation to be unhappy with this New Order. In fact, in some cases, it might be better to leave certain characters ignorant of the exact details of what is going on. Let them be surprised to find out that the Republic is dead, replaced by this so-called Empire.

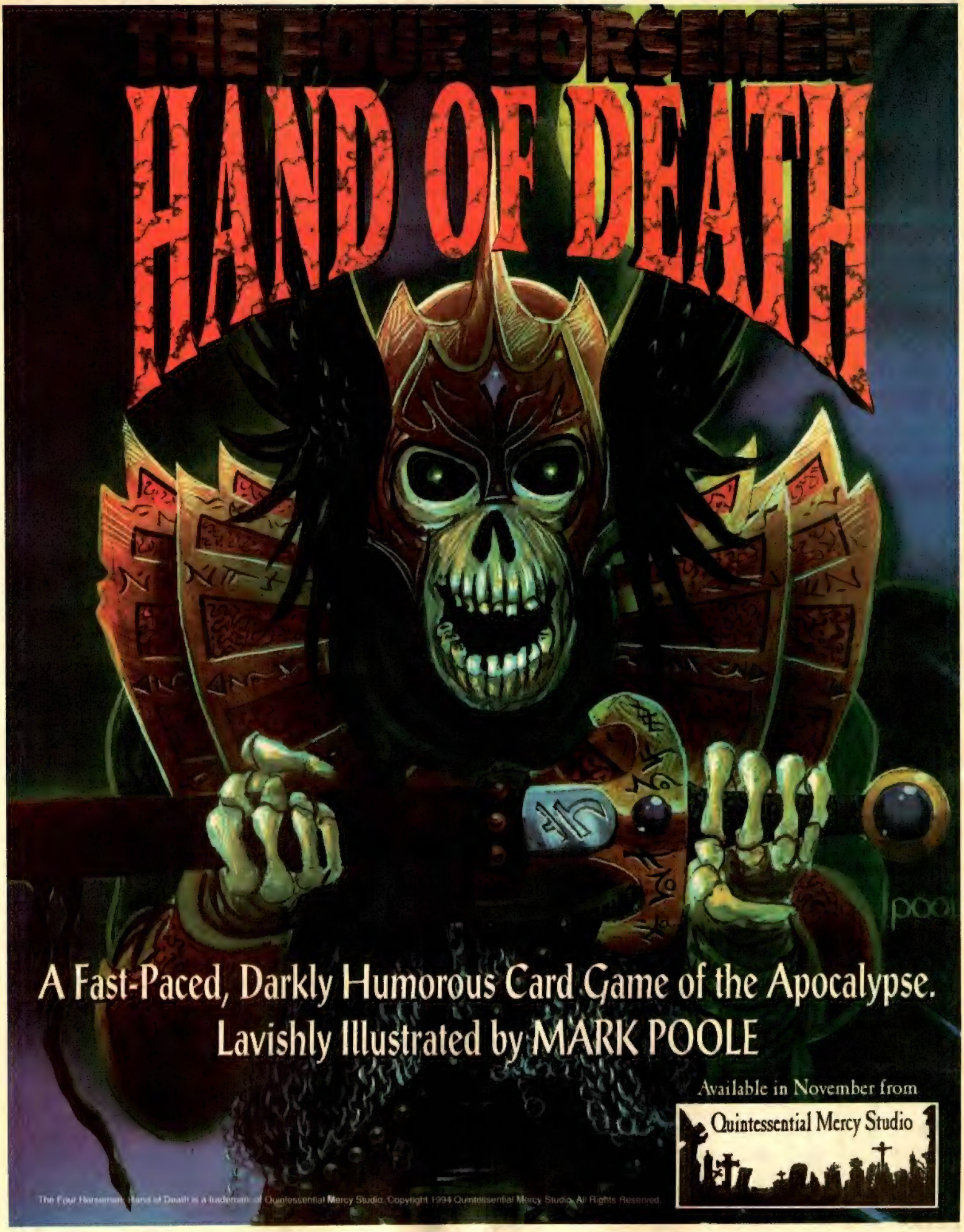
The player characters' first adventures should be centered around getting together (through circumstances beyond their control, normally) and crossing paths with New Order operatives who see them as threats. It is best to encourage one or more of the PCs to go ahead and be actively working against the new Empire, while others have to be talked into it. This will create some great role-playing opportunities as the activist PCs passionately argue with the others, trying to get them to see what is happening and join in the fight against it.

Eventually, they should end up in contact with one rebellious faction or another. Bear in mind that in the early days, there are numerous fractional elements that resisted the New Order and the Empire, but they did not become an organized body until Mon Mothma and others like her struggled to unite these factions. The PCs might even end up starting their own rebellious faction, one that will ultimately become well-known for its actions against the Empire and be asked to join the new Alliance.

The Bad Guys

It is important for the GM to note that this is the early days of the Empire. As such, certain recognizable elements are not necessarily in place yet. Specifically, the GM should hold off on introducing Imperial Stormtroopers until a good bit later in the campaign, and TIE-Fighters shouldn't show up until a couple of years after the Empire is formed.

In the place of such "standards," the GM should utilize Imperial Army and Naval Troopers for the typical Imperial ground or shipboard encounter, and Z-95 Headhunters for most initial space battles. Stats for these and other appropriate ships and soldiers can be found in almost every sourcebook that


THE FOUR HORSEMEN
HAND OF DEATH
A Fast-Paced, Darkly Humorous Card Game of the Apocalypse.
Lavishly Illustrated by MARK POOLE
Available in November from
Quintessential Mercy Studio
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West End Games has published (especially the STAR WARS SOURCEBOOK).

However, in the early days when chaos reigned and COMPNOR's word was law, there were operatives that any enemy of the Empire was likely to face. The following are some of these types.

COMPNOR ISB AGENT

DEX: 2D
Blaster: 3D
Dodge: 3D
KNOWLEDGE: 3D+2
Bureaucracy: 4D
Intimidation: 4D+2
Streetwise: 4D+1
Willpower: 4D
MECHANICAL: 1D

PERCEPTION: 3D+1
Con: 4D+1
Investigation: 5D
Search: 4D+2
Sneak: 4D
STRENGTH: 1D
Brawling: 2D
TECHNICAL: 1D
Security: 3D

An ISB agent might be from any one of a number of branches, including Surveillance, Interrogations, and Internal Affairs. However, PCs are most likely to encounter Investigations agents. There is no standard uniform for such agents; they tend to wear fairly conservative suits unless they are incognito (in which case they will wear whatever best aids their cover).

Normally, ISB agents will be armed with little more than a hold-out blaster (3D) and they rarely wear armor; they leave the heavy stuff to other agents or soldiers.

COMPNOR ISB ENFORCEMENT AGENT

DEXTERITY: 3D+1
Blaster: 5D
Dodge: 4D+1
Brawling Parry: 4D+1
KNOWLEDGE: 1D+2
Intimidation: 3D+2
Streetwise: 2D+2
MECHANICAL: 1D+1

PERCEPTION: 2D
Search: 3D

STRENGTH: 2D
Brawling: 3D+1
TECHNICAL: 1D+2
Demolitions: 2D+2
Security: 2D+2

ISB's Enforcement agents are a different breed from the rest of the Bureau. In fact, many of them aren't actually COMPNOR members, a fact that bothers COMPNOR "purists" and Internal Affairs to no end.

As Enforcement agents are rarely called in unless an operation has reached a more overt stage, they will almost always be encountered ready for a conflict. They are normally armed with heavy blaster pistols (5D) and armored in at least blast vests (or the equivalent). Their uniforms consist of dark blues and grey piping and trim.

COMPFORCE ASSAULT TROOPERS

DEXTERITY: 2D+2
Blaster: 3D+2
Dodge: 3D+2
KNOWLEDGE: 1D+1
Survival: 2D
MECHANICAL: 1D+1

PERCEPTION: 1D+1
Command: 1D+2
STRENGTH: 3D+1
Brawling: 4D
Stamina: 4D+1
TECHNICAL: 2D
First Aid: 2D+2

The fanaticism that drives CompForce troopers is a frightening thing to behold. Whereas the Stormtroopers that the heroes will encounter later go about their deadly business with silent and precise determination, CompForce Assault soldiers are berserkers in combat, throwing themselves at their enemies with a nearly religious zeal. The training methods of the party are such that only the toughest even survive, much less go on to gain the coveted status. They lack real technical training or enhancement of skills, but they more than make up for it with zeal and sheer toughness.

COMPNOR sees to it that their own troops receive priority on special gear and weaponry. CompForce troops wear a distinctive white and grey uniform, complete with partial armor (1D+1 vs Physical, +2 vs Energy). They are typically armed with blaster rifles (5D) and at least three grenades. Their helmets come with sensory enhancements (+1D Perception) and minor life support capabilities.

In addition, enemies of the Empire will likely encounter Imperial Intelligence operatives; however, it is best if these agents are done up individually, as their specializations and capabilities will be wide and various. For simplicity's sake, though, the GM might simply use the stats for an ISB Agent or ISB Enforcement Agent when needed.

Like It Or Not

An Adventure Outline for STAR WARS

This adventure is designed to be a potential opening scenario for a campaign set in the time-frame described above. There are certain roles that need to be fulfilled by PCs, so the GM will need to work with the players to determine which characters best fulfill those roles. In some cases, more than one character can be working together to perform a given function. Where there is no character that can fulfill the role, one of the players will need to adjust to play a character that will or the GM will need to run an NPC to do the job.

The Roles

- **The Contact:** This will be an individual who is friendly to Mon Mothma and her cause (which is opposing the New Order). This individual will be the one who is supposed to arrange for her passage to the Outer Rim territories and facilitate her escape from ISB agents.
- **The Arranger:** This is the "Fringe" type operator who was hired by the **Contact** to arrange for a transport. He should be shifty and a con artist, but ultimately he should have no love for the Empire and get caught up in the struggle.
- **The Pilot:** This character is the one who the **Arranger** contacted about a special "job." He's been having plenty of troubles with COMPNOR operatives, although he hasn't heard yet about Palpatine's declaration of the Empire. The **Pilot** needs to be from Chandrila, thus giving him a stronger motivation to help.
- **The Rogue Cadet:** Ideally, this is a young pilot just graduated from the Republic Academy. Their romantic interest works for Mon Mothma as part of her staff. Alternately, this could be some other military or intelligence operative who has the added information the heroes will need.

Part One

This will be the trickiest part to run, because the GM will need to choreograph each of the PCs into the situation so that they all come together at the right moment. If done right, they will be thrown together in such a way that they will have a common enemy and will eventually band together as friends and comrades-in-arms.

Mon Mothma, the firebrand Senator from Chandrila who has opposed Palpatine at every turn, learned that she has been branded a traitor by the self-styled Emperor. Bail Organa, another influential Senator secretly sympathetic to her cause, arranged to get her transported to a military space station, where she was to hook up with a Scout Service ship that would drop her off in the main starport of the Inner Rim planet, Renor. From Renor, Mon Mothma was to get in touch with the **Contact**, who was to arrange for transport to the Outer Rim.

The **Contact** has been in touch with the **Arranger**, who has, in turn, gotten word to the **Pilot**. The date, time, and place have all been established. The **Pilot** is to bring his ship to Supply Depot Port 27, which is located on the outskirts of the city, where Mon Mothma and her entourage, including the

Contact, would meet them and take off. Of course, the **Arranger** managed to avoid telling the **Pilot** just what the nature of this "special cargo" was and how dangerous the mission would be. . . .

Unfortunately, although Mon Mothma and her entourage manage to elude ISB agents, agents of another faction are able to discover the plan (they have secretly been watching Mothma's every move since Palpatine's election). They intercept her at the starbase and carry her and her entourage off for parts unknown.

The **Rogue Cadet** was visiting with their paramour when this occurred; the **Rogue Cadet** barely managed to escape, but not so their love interest and Mon Mothma. They know that Mon Mothma was headed for Renor to meet with the **Contact** (and they know the name of the **Contact**), so that seemed their only logical choice. Their career with this new Empire tossed to the wind, they stole a ship and headed for Renor.

Part Two

The time for Mon Mothma's rendezvous long past, the **Contact** makes their way to the meeting site, hoping to stall for time and find out what has happened. Unfortunately, they have been spotted by ISB Surveillance operatives, and ISB Enforcers and CompForce troops have been scrambled to pick the **Contact** (and friends) up.

The **Contact** arrives at Port 27 and meets with the **Arranger**. Of course, the problems will create tension as they argue over the situation (the **Arranger** hasn't received all their money, and they probably feel they are due even if the "package" doesn't arrive). That's when the **Pilot** (and crew) show up, further complicating the issue.

At this point, all the PCs should be somehow worked into the scene save for the **Rogue Cadet**, who will arrive momentarily.

At some dramatic moment, perhaps at the high-point of the argument, ISB and CompForce operatives will open fire. The GM is encouraged to decide what the best number is to give the PCs a scare but not easily defeat them. The next "wave" of agents are on their way, however, and have the place surrounded.

The obvious choice will be to climb aboard the **Pilot**'s craft and escape. However, as they do, Imperial ships (probably Z-95 Headhunters) will be spotted. This is where the **Rogue Cadet** comes in, assisting the **Pilot** in blasting away and defeating the imperial ships. The heroes get away by the skin of their teeth and with most of them in hot water with the new Empire.

At this point, the situation is such that the GM is encouraged to let the players decide the best course of action. They must, essentially, do two things:

1) Find out who took Mon Mothma and where.

2) Rescue her (as well as the **Rogue Cadet**'s love interest).

One of the most obvious ways to go about this is to "slice" into Imperial databanks and search for data regarding her kidnapping. Finding the right place to go and ask questions is another possibility.

Rather than cover all the possible methods, or plot out a linear course, this adventure will remain open-ended for the GM to determine (or allow the PCs to determine) where they go and how they find out what they need to know.

Ultimately, they will discover that the ex-Senator has been taken by Senator Pel Talon, a man who is in line to become one of the Emperor's Grand Moffs. He has kept his abduction of her a secret, hoping to exploit this situation in the near future once all the chaos has died down and he is sure who is in command.

Pel is holding Mon Mothma and her entourage in his private retreat in the Mid Rim sector. He has a Victory-class Destroyer and her crew at his disposal (the Captain and he go a back a long way), as well as his own personal guard (use ISB Enforcer stats for them, but add vibro-blades, STR+3D).

The estate is, essentially, an ancient castle. He has kept the technology within to a minimum, especially in the dungeon, where Mon Mothma is being kept. This will force the PCs to deal with archaic mechanical locks and such. The GM is encouraged to utilize any maps of medieval-style estates or castles they have on hand (a good chance to re-use some old D&D™ modules or whatever else you may have; Palladium's COMPENDIUM OF WEAPONS, ARMOR, AND CASTLES is an excellent source).

The heroes will have to break or sneak in, find and rescue the hostages, and escape again, all under the threat of a star destroyer. Of course, as happened in the author's run, they might well con their way onto the destroyer and then sabotage it. To add more drama (and challenge), the GM might add in a band of capable mercenaries in Talon's employ. Additionally, Talon may have a force shield surrounding the complex that the heroes will have to bypass.

Finally, Pel himself is no pushover. He has begun the path of the Dark Side of the Force. . . .

SENATOR PEL TALON

DEXTERITY 3D+1

Blaster 6D+1, Heavy Blaster Pistol 7D+1, Brawling Parry 5D, Dodge 6D+1, Lightsaber 5D+1, Melee Combat 4D, Melee Combat: Sword 6D, Melee Parry 5D+1

KNOWLEDGE 3D

Bureaucracy 5D, Ancient Cultures 7D, Ancient History 7D, Willpower 5D+2

MECHANICAL 2D+2

Beast Riding 3D+2

PERCEPTION 3D+2

Command 4D+2, Persuasion 4D, Search 4D+1

STRENGTH 2D+1

Brawling 3D

TECHNICAL 2D

This character is Force Sensitive.

Force Skills: Control 4D, Sense 3D, Alter 2D

Force Points: 2

Dark Side Points: 7

Character Points: 13

Move: 10

Equipment: Lightsaber (5D), Heavy Blaster Pistol (5D), Archaic Armor, Modified (+1D all attacks; gauntlets give him +1D Strength for Brawling damage)

Senator Pel Talon has long had a fascination with the "old ways," the times when there was royalty and matters of honor were dealt with through direct blood-spilling. He is most fascinated with the what he calls the "brutal, honest" nature of those times (even though he is more than willing to use deceit and subterfuge for his goals).

To this end, he has taken up residence in the ancient castle that has been in his family for generations, and he has maintained the motif as much as possible. Even what technology there is (for he is not so foolish as to not have any on the premises, especially in terms of arming his troops) has been disguised as much as possible.

Finally, he has begun his study of the Force. He has, in the past, met with Palpatine and Vader to enhance his gifts. He is a formidable (if somewhat odd) opponent. ❑

— ATLAS GAMES PRESENTS —

A 117—card expansion set for On the Edge™
by JONATHAN TWEET

Shadows

THEY ONLY COME OUT AT NIGHT

As sunset creeps across Al Amarja, sinister shadows steal forth from the encroaching darkness. Nightfall brings malevolence to the island — hideous acts and diabolical plots waiting to hatch in the dark, twisting alleys and dead-end streets of the Edge.

Here on Al Amarja, the struggle for control is waged by simple forces. Misguided and exploited, these hopeless minions unwittingly serve higher forces, their lives expendable, their actions those of pawns engaged in a deadly chess match. This game is one of consummate deception, a game with stakes more monumental than the meager lives of its contenders. But the arrogance of power conceals its own limitations. The real power behind the throne often lurks cloaked in shadows.

COMING IN MAY 1995

on the Edge

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Feature Review: *Slasher: The Final Cut*

By John C Williams and Jim Pinto

Ted moved slowly through the kitchen. A trail of blood led to a butcher's knife on the counter of Alice's kitchen! (Dunt-dunt-duu!)

Jim: Yawn. This is where we flash to Alice having a quarrel with someone, right?

John: To the uneducated mind, it would seem so, but the social significance mirrors a territorial paranoia and a level of mistrust amongst even our closest friends.

Jim: Shut up! This is B-horror stuff, Johnny. Not Stephen Barker Kubrik.

John: Oh, yeah.

Slasher is a 3-6 player non–collectible storytelling card game that plots out, scene to scene, a well scripted (humph?) B-grade horror flick. The players control both the characters in the movie and the psycho chainsaw-wielding, devil-worshipping, maniacal slasher loon! Oh yeah, they help write the movie too. In addition, each player tries to keep their persona alive in the movie (there are up to 6 of these).

The game board/killing ground/sound stage/movie lot is a five room house and an outside area. The board is merely a sheet of paper with photos transposed onto the paper to represent rooms, while normal card stock counters represent life points, clue points, death markers, an action marker, the slasher and it's victims.

A step away from most "card games," even dying keeps you in the game, and winning is a very anti-climactic ending to a tense game of cat and mouse (where the cat is a mountain lion and the mice are blind, deaf, and dumb).

The objective — stay alive! Or, if your character earns enough clue points, they become the slasher (although this too could change).

The cold touch of death gripped Jack as he searched the cellar carrying a tire-iron. He had heard a noise and now Carol was missing. Creak! A floor board? A gust of wind? A gun-toting kill-happy crazy? Perhaps. The dark was ominous and foreboding, and Jack was frozen in his tracks. Chop-chop-chop.

John: Deeply moving scene. Reminiscent of such chilling thrillers as Blood Bath 7 or Psycho Nut Case Serial Killer 3!

Jim: What?

John: You know, the one starring Brooke Curtis and directed by Sam Rainman. It had

3 gallons of blood and was banned in 17 counties in southwestern Georgia.

Jim: Oh.

John: Don't tell me you didn't see Blood Bath 7! Hello? Anybody home?

Jim: I've been busy. Sorry. I did see Silver Bullet though.

John: Ugh! That's not a slasher movie. Besides, what has that to do with Jack being ripped to shreds by the killer in this movie.

Jim: I'm sorry, I was getting your nachos. I missed the scene.

John: Arrrgh!

All turns begin with the play of a scene card. That scene card is then twisted by a plot-twist card by each player in turn counter-clockwise around the table, and ending with the player that started the scene.

Each scene has an effect in the game that either hurts the characters, moves the characters around the house, or leads to a clue as to who the slasher could be.

A highly interactive game, the quality of play is dictated by the quality of players. Those unwilling to add to the story or embellish the dialog of the scenes will no doubt diminish the fun.

The bloody glove was Dianne's all right. And now there were only four of them left alive to stop her reign of terror. But wasn't Bob supposed to be out of the shower by now? The door to the bathroom slowly opened and a hot blast of steam exited though the open doorway. Hot, running water poured down onto a slumped over form in the shower. A towel rack rod shoved through his chest, blood gurgling down the drain. Oh, my God! Bob!

John: Did you notice how quickly we were thrown into Act 2, in that last part?

Jim: Act what? What the hell are you talking about?

John: Well, the movie was clearly separated by two finite points of action. First, the characters were thrust into an intense, traumatic situation. And then wham! Dianne is the killer in the cellar with a huge hook shaped hand, and shotgun arm.

Jim: Like in the Fugitive?

John: NO! How did you get this job?

There are two distinct acts of the story. When the Slasher is finally identified we are in Act 2 and the player that controls the character that is believed to be the Slasher, then controls the actions of the Slasher and is the only player able to perform actions for the Slasher. Prior to Act 2 (also known as Act 1) any player may have the Slasher move and kill and maim and rest and sneeze. In either Act, a player whose character is D.O.A. may only perform actions for the Slasher as well, adding significantly to the carnage and helping to rid the world of menacing, stupid teenage actors.

Carol was the only one left. Dianne was hurt, but not down. Carol crawled under the sofa in the living room.

The .44 magnum and her four bullets would have to end the wave of death. Dianne stumbled into the living room and revved the motor of the chainsaw. Once. Twice. The blades spun wildly and Carol's screams could be heard from the ends of the earth.

John: YES!

Jim: Is it over yet?

John: Yes, you can open your eyes now!

Jim: Whew! —Ahhhhh!

John: Hehehehehe. Blood. Hehehehe.

Jim: Ahhhhhhhh! Mommy!

The game ends when only one remains, either as Slasher or as lame actor stooge. In the case that no clues ever lead to the killer, and he is victorious, then there is no winner. In either case the game is as real as F/X, low-budget sound foley mixing, and cheesy man-made props are.

"The best horror card game in years. Sure to be a hit at the box office!"

Jim Pinto

"Slasher does to horror games what game companies do to our wallets!"

John C. Williams (hi mom!)

High points of Slasher include the Sex and Gratuitous Nudity scene cards, Accident, Quarrel, and Flashback, Frenzy, Bizarre Event, Evil Genius music in the background, and a good night's rest. The cards are huge and fill your hand!

Low points: Loser gamers who ruin our sessions (you know who you are — die!), and silly puns in the rulebook! ❑

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GAME MASTER'S WORKSHOP

Hook, Line & Sinker™

Adventures on the Fly!

SHADIS PRESENTS "HLS GOES TO HOLLYWOOD CONTEST"

HLS may be going to Hollywood, but the lucky winner of this special contest will be going to **GENCON** as our guests. This is a somewhat nonstandard version of our standard HLS feature. You see, in honor of our Movie & TV issue, we've taken some of our favorite movies and recast them into HLS scenarios in a different genre. We may set a Western in the far future, or put a modern-day action flick into a dark future (whose inhabitants probably wouldn't notice).

The kicker? We've decided to run it as a contest. The winner will receive a four-day pass to **GENCON '95**, courtesy of **TSR Inc.** The Grand Prize winner also gets to go shopping at our booth and take one of everything that they don't already have — and we'll also set them up with some other goodies.The first ten runners-up will get a copy of the hard-to-find **SHADIS #15**, which includes a *Legends* card.

So how do you enter? First, figure out which movie corresponds to each HLS. Write down your answers (in order, please!) and mail them to:

SHADIS Magazine, 4045 Guasti Rd., Suite 212, Ontario, CA 91761.
Make sure to mark it **ATTN: HLS Contest.**
Entries must be postmarked by June 15, 1995 to qualify.

The person with the highest percentage of correct answers will win the four-day GENCON pass. Ties for first place and (if necessary) runner-up will be broken by random drawing. Good luck, and we'll see you at GENCON!

1. Zombie Plague

Hook: The party is entering a new town.
Line: People in town start dying mysteriously and with little or no warning around the party. The next night, anyone who died returns as a zombie.
Sinker: These deaths are the result of a curse delivered by a renegade priest. While fighting their way through the zombies, the party must discover that the local church knew about this curse beforehand and has a scroll that will combat it, but is unwilling to use the scroll because the elders want to be able to use the curse on their lifelong enemies on the other side of the mountain.

David Williams

2. GQ Orcs

Hook: During down time between regular adventures, a player has been invited to a small gathering at large local temple. The PC feels compelled to attend because of all the things the temple's head priest has done for him and his party.
Line: Sometime during the party the PC has reason to slip away from the main group. While he is gone a group of Orcs raids the main room and takes all the party guests hostage. The PC sees what is happening, but too late; he is unable to do anything because the Orcs and Ogres are better armed — and he has checked his weapons upon entering the Temple. (If the character is a Mage, then he has been asked not to cast offensive magics within the temple under any circumstances).
Sinker: The Orcs play themselves off as freedom fighters who have taken the hostages to the King to free other captive humanoids. In reality they are just very good thieves who are there to steal a powerful magic artifact which is guarded by many levels of spells. They have a mage and thief with them who will need eight hours to get the artifact out. During this time the unarmed PC will have an opportunity to confront some of the Orcs individually; he will have to foil their plans from the inside because the town militia who have gathered outside have no clue as to how to handle the situation.

John Zinser

3. BBC Calling

Hook: This HLS would make an excellent starting adventure for a group of players that have never played together before. The Player Characters are strangers to each other and meet by chance in bar. Through a series of seemingly coincidental events, the 'strangers' are forced to trust each other in order to complete a quest.
Line: While in the bar, the player characters are drawn into a game of chance with a Non-Player Character. During the game the NPC starts to lose and begins putting up strange items as collateral. The GM should rig the game so that each player ends up with a different item. The first item is a map to a remote cemetery. The second item is a piece of paper with a charcoal rubbing of a tombstone showing the name of a deceased person. The last item is a map showing the location of a buried treasure which indicates a special key is needed to unlock the magical seal guarding it.
At the end of the game the NPC will explain that he buried the key in the grave of a departed friend at the cemetery. He explains that the players will have to work together in order to find the cemetery, retrieve the key and find the treasure.
Sinker: This can be a fun adventure if the GM handles it right. The players will not immediately trust each other and the GM should do what he can to build upon that mistrust. The adventure cannot be

"And it shall come to pass in that day that the lord shall punish the Host of the high ones that are on high and the kings of the earth upon the earth."

Isaiah 24:21

HERESY

Kingdom Come

Judgment is Nigh

Summer 1995

Heresy: Kingdom Come is Last Unicorn Games' trademark for its collectible trading card game of fallen angels, virtual prophets and chromeopathic dreamwalkers, all struggling to achieve Re-ascension amidst the Ruin of a Decaying Matrix and a Forsaken Earth.

LAST UNICORN GAMES

solved without each player sharing his bit of information. It won't do any good for the one player to locate the cemetery because there are a thousand graves there and he doesn't have the name of the dead friend. The player with the name doesn't know which cemetery the grave is in, and even if he did, he doesn't know what to do with the key if he finds it. The player with the treasure map needs the key to get the treasure. The GM can spice up the adventure by throwing in a shadowy figure who is apparently trailing the group. He can simply be a thief who got wind of the treasure and is hoping the players will lead him to it.

Jolly R. Blackburn

4. The Race

Hook: The party has joined a caravan in order to pass through a remote area in relative safety.

Line: The caravan passes a burning wagon. Upon inspecting the area a dying man is discovered. Try as they might, the party is unable to save the man. Before he dies, however, he divulges a secret. He claims he is the famous "Thief of Raven Rock." The party will have heard of the famous thief and of his legendary heist. The thief was able to breach the royal treasury of a great King and make off with the crown jewels. The King has devoted hundreds of thousands of gold pieces and thousands of soldiers to the task of finding the thief over the past ten years.

Incredibly, the thief claims he was never able to move the jewels out of the area and that they are buried in a public park in a local city. As he takes his last breath, the thief tells the crowd that has gathered around him that the treasure is buried under a "great bird".

Sinker: Unfortunately for the party, the entire caravan (which is largely made up of strangers) has heard the man's tale. It will be up to the party to beat the others to the treasure or work out a deal.

To add a little heat to the situation, one of the caravan drivers is a retired soldier who is loyal to the King. He will report what he has heard to the King as soon as possible, which means the party will have to deal with the law and city officials as well as the other caravan members.

B.A. Felton

5. Starbase Dread

Hook: This HLS is for a sci-fi setting. The party has drifted into a remote, rundown starbase that has earned the infamous nickname "Dread."

Line: A group of brothers have managed to take control of the starbase and have been bleeding it dry. One of the brothers is the Starbase constable, another brother is the Magistrate. The brothers do as they wish on the base and the inhabitants live in constant fear of being targeted by their ire.

Sinker: The party immediately runs afoul of the brothers. The GM can have them catch one of the brothers cheating in a game of chance.

If the party makes a stand against the brothers, the starbase inhabitants will rally long enough to ask them to remove the brothers from power. If they clean up the starbase, the inhabitants offer the party a percentage of the profits from the starbase's tavern.

George Wakeman

6. Ship of Death

Hook: The party is on sailing ship far out at sea on a voyage.

Line: During the voyage the ship stumbles across an uncharted island and the ship's captain stops momentarily to explore it. The crew discovers a wide variety of fruits and berries as well as fresh water. They also find a peculiar gemstone which is about the size of a grapefruit. About a dozen of the stones are discovered and brought on board.

Sinker: Several days after the ship has visited the island, several crewmembers are found horribly mauled and mangled. The strange gemstones were actually eggs which have since hatched.

The creatures are extremely elusive; apparently they are able to blend in with the wooden fittings and riggings of the ship and escape notice.

As such the party will find it difficult, if not impossible, to kill the creatures without destroying the ship itself.

B. A. Felton

7. Here They Come a Burstin' Out!

Hook: The posse spies a flock of buzzards circlin' 'round and 'round a spot in the road ahead.

Line: Upon investigation, the hombres find the corpse of a man with his chest torn open; all that's left of his horse is a dried, bloodless husk. Inside the man's satchel is a letter of distress addressed to the sheriff of the next town, which is a three-day ride in the direction the party was coming from.

Sinker: The note is from a small pioneering village about six miles from here. It reads:

Dear Sheriff.
People is dying.
Please send help.
Aaaahhrrrggg!

When the posse investigates, they will come upon a ghastly scene of death and carnage. A viscous black goo drips from the walls and rafters of most of the village. Several of the pioneers are encased in the icky stuff, alive but not at all well. Of course, when one of the party members approaches one of the unfortunate colonists, the victim's chest will erupt and a giant black leech will come a-burstin' out! The independently mobile leech will attach itself to the nearest living host and, given sufficient time, will grow to ten times its original size; about 10 feet long! If it attaches to a host, the leech will implant its eggs and in a day or two, a whole new leech will come a-burstin' out! A pond on the edge of the town is the spawning ground of the little buggers and there also lies the big mamma leech. The party will need to exterminate the vermin or the leeches will eventually suck the blood out of the entire world!

By the way, they hate fire!

Matt Wilson

8. Life of an Anthropologist

Hook: An anthropologist and his/her entourage are investigating a prison colony world Earth has lost contact with.

Line: While checking out the crash site of a colony ship, they come across a native, who leads them to the town the prisoners and crew from the original prison ship constructed. Whatever their original crimes, the ancestors of the current inhabitants left behind a mostly law-abiding, if rough around the edges, frontier town. There is a mutual attraction between the anthropologist and one of the natives; when s/he leaves for Earth, the native comes along.

Sinker: The native, while exceptionally skilled in hand to hand combat with his/her weapons (particularly long knives), has a penchant for getting the anthropologist into trouble with the seedier elements of the Big City, though s/he always makes the situation aright; at first. The costs of making up to offended citizens threatens to bankrupt the anthropologist, despite the native's charming personality and adorable quirks.

Wayne Wallace

The Time Travelers

Breaking the Barriers of Time in Role-Playing Games

By Larry Granato © 1995 • Illustrated by Richard E. Emond © 1995

Jolly Blackburn's **Just a Matter of Time** articles about a time travel campaign in **SHADIS** #11 and #12 made me think back about all the great time travel stories I have read, and of course, to TV series like **Dr. Who™** and **The Time Tunnel™**. Jolly's proposed campaign background fits best with a science-fiction or cyberpunk game, but there's no reason to limit time travel to just those milieus. A gamemaster (GM) can easily incorporate a time traveling element in many different settings including cross-dimensional based campaigns, mixed genre, superhero, and technofantasy.

H.P. Lovecraft mentioned time travel in some of his stories, so time travel fits into a **Call of Cthulhu™** game, and other types of supernatural horror. Of course, H. G. Wells' story **The Time Machine** goes right with a Victorian Age setting. Time travel is not uncommon in **Star Trek™**, and is a staple in comics.

In a fantasy campaign it is certainly possible, as in Jack Vance's **Rhialto the Marvelous** stories which are part of his classic **Dying Earth** saga. There are some other ways a party can "travel" in time. Dreams are available to any tech level. Computer simulations, such as virtual reality/holodeck type systems or direct mental interfaces can be used. There may also be places where live reenactments of past ages take place — a theme park like **Westworld** or a locale with live actors. One such is described in L. Sprague de Camp's **The Glory That Was**, where the people of a future Greece were brainwashed into thinking it was ancient times, and the entire country was rebuilt that way. Clairvoyance or "farseeing" into the future or past is a form of mental time travel.

While this doesn't mean that the GM should necessarily allow player characters (PC's) to routinely travel in time, he might devise a adventure that incorporates time travel themes, or allow a one-time temporal excursion. Certainly the possibility of encountering time travelers could exist in

any campaign, as long as it does not create an unbalancing effect.

Time Travel Adventures

Time travel is possible not only with the classic "time machine" but by such things as poorly understood magical or alien artifacts, mighty spells, locations which exhibit temporal anomalies, gates, time warps, immense psionic powers, traveling cosmic rifts, catastrophic cataclysms, and the manipulations of inscrutable aliens, high-technology civilizations, and super-powerful beings.

Wishes are often used in such ways as to duplicate the effects of time travel. Make sure that these options are used sparingly, so PC's don't keep getting chances to "go back" and redo things they've screwed up.

One thing that time travel adventures should utilize is a sense of history. The past is not interesting if it seems exactly like the "present" your players are used to. GM's should change their style of refereeing. Try to depict the situation to the players in a different way; have NPC's speak with an accent, use unusual words, extra description, and so on. Make up some new rules or modify a few of the old ones. For example, if your players are used to zipping across a settled galaxy, send them back to a time when hyperdrives where cranky and space was mostly unexplored. In a fantasy setting, the party might visit an age where magic was much more powerful than their own.

Throw in an short encounter with a famous historical personage for color. Make reference to important past events in current terms ("The Titanic's sailing today! Don't you wish you could be aboard?"). Let NPCs give the party their own views of the future ("IBM? Don't waste your money on card-punching machines, sonny. Invest in the railroads," or "Gee, by 1960 there will be world peace and prosperity, and people will take food pills instead of eating.")

A good adventure needs vigorous PC involvement. Maybe they only wanted to be observers, but happenstance might require that the party take action to preserve the timeline. There's always the chance that the PC's mere presence causes trouble. Mistaken identity or an accident can force participation. For example, the party inadvertently prevents a important NPC from doing something he was historically known to accomplish. They must somehow bring about the result, or face a different future.

A typical time travel adventure begins when evidence is uncovered that shows someone is meddling in the past. It's up to the party to go back and prevent any harmful interventions. Another scenario is the escape of criminals to past times, where they must be pursued. In this case the fugitive(s) are less of a threat to the timeline as to the people living there, since they may be reckless in their use of advanced technology and weapons.

A more complex starting point would be an archeological dig which finds something unusual, say, a spaceship in the paleolithic. How did it get there? If the party lacks the means for time travel, there are still plenty of ways for them to visit the past.

An example of this case could begin when the party stumbles across the ruins of an ancient city. They find writings which apparently detail the doom that befell the moldering metropolis. As they struggle to translate them something occurs which thrusts the party back into the past. Suddenly they are back in the now-thriving city, just before it is to be destroyed! This scenario can work for a fantasy, horror, or SF type game. It provides a sense of urgency which is necessary, since characters who are able to travel across the centuries may feel that they "have all the time in the world". Perhaps by having a portal closing on their chance to return can keep things moving.

Maybe the party finds a special locale, like a megalithic stone circle or transdimensional tavern that enables them to enter into other eras. Or if they come across time travel experiments by outsiders, they may be forced to another age because "they know too much".

A friendly wizard or government agents can approach the party to help with a rescue mission. The PC's have to save some NPC's lost in another time before they precipitate a disaster. Some time travel agencies recruit agents from many different eras. Or the PCs can simply be picked up by curious travelers and taken along on their journeys, too.

Time Intervention - Laws of Time

Time intervention is the act of attempting to change the present by manipulating the past. In many cases the party's goal is to prevent manipulation by troublemakers. It is subject to the principles of time travel, also known as the Laws of Time, which are covered in "Just a Matter of Time" in issue #12 of SHADIS, but I'll go over the high points again.

The First Law (the "grandfather" paradox) prevents characters from interfering in their own past existence. Causality requires that such actions simply cannot happen — but, of course, there are always exceptions.

There are two main currents of thought in science fiction about the effects of time travel. The first is that every action at every moment, no matter how trivial-seeming, is of critical importance, and minor changes could create an entire new reality. The second holds that time is like a vast river where individual actions are like pebbles thrown in; they may make ripples but the course of the river remains unchanged. However, there may be "choke points" (temporal nexuses) where it is possible to change the flow of the river.

Temporal nexuses, or T-junctions, are places where the river is shallow and more easily diverted. As with any major project, the proper engineering (i.e., historical research) must be done so that the river of time (the timestream or timeline) is deflected onto the desired path.

The second theory is more suited to a role-playing game and the first theory should only be brought up when time traveling characters are becoming over involved in time intervention. In other words, time-traveling PC's should be allowed to make necessary interventions but should otherwise avoid unintended side effects.

It should be clear that by the First Law of Time, travelers get only one chance to go back and intervene in a particular period. If something stops them, then they may try to go to another time and try a different intervention, but things begin to get much more complicated and failure is likely.

Items cannot be moved from one era to another provided that they have a history fixed in the timeline. In this case, history means that the item has been noticed by someone or its presence has an appreciable effect on future history.

There is no reason why the GM can't allow travelers to bring back inconsequential items, although they might be subject to aging effects. It may be possible to recover certain historical objects provided they are replaced with adequate forgeries, and no one notices the switch. Things that have mysteriously disappeared in the past may well have been snatched up by time travelers (seen the crew of the Marie Celeste, anyone?).

The Other Time Travelers

If the PC's can travel in time, then there's no doubt that others can, too. This opens the possibility of interactions with visi-

tors from other times, particularly more advanced periods (i.e., the future).

However, time travelers normally want to remain inconspicuous and avoid interference in the past, and they usually have the means to do so. The party may not even realize that they've had a time traveler encounter. It's possible that the travelers may give them some useful bit of information about something that's going to happen, if they're not saddled with a non-interference rule.

This is one area where the GM has the edge on the players, because travelers from the future can be considered to already know what's in store for the party, aside from being much better equipped. This is very useful when the party gets out of hand.

GM: Ok, you've defeated the guards and have entered the secret cavern. Ahead you see a shiny metal sphere with a lot of wires attached to it.

First Player: It's the Nazis' experimental A-bomb!

Second Player: We made it just in time! That V-2 rocket outside is aimed for London.

GM: So you set your demolitions to collapse the cave?

Third Player: Hey I've got a better idea. Let's take the bomb and drop it on Moscow. That oughta eliminate a lot of grief in the coming years.

Other Players: Yeah!

GM: Uh, ok. Suddenly you see an old man in a battered coat standing by the bomb.

First Player: Where he'd come from?

GM: You didn't see him come from anywhere. He says "I wouldn't do that if I were you."

Third Player: Oh yeah! How'd you like to eat a plasma burst, fellah?

GM (as old man): "I think you'll find your weapons and time travel gear has been deactivated."

Players (checking): Ok, well, maybe you're right.

GM (as old man): "How kind of you to agree. By the way would you like a lift back to your own century?"

Civilizations — Chronotechnology (CT) Levels

The following is a overview of time travel technology available in a campaign with a semi-historical basis. This information is for the GM, as the PCs won't have any knowledge of technologies more advanced than their own. High technology does not automatically mean time travel, but it helps. It is certainly possible to have a very advanced galaxy-spanning civilization that has no knowledge of time travel, while there may be a culture of rather backward beings who can travel through some innate or magical means.

Level 0 civilizations make up the vast majority of those encountered and are probably the safest to visit. Travelers are seen simply as strangers who seem a bit peculiar. Level 1 or higher cultures, because of their own temporal expertise, become very wary of travelers and often take direct action to control, limit, or capture them.

CT LEVEL 0: Time travel is almost unknown at this level of chronotechnology, and most people don't believe in it. The period ranges from the most distant past (including medieval-fantasy settings) to sometime between the 19th to 21st centuries (and much further, until time travel is invented). It is also the level where most time intervention occurs. Temporal voyaging is impossible aside from the effects of a few rare artifacts, singular anomalies or the actions of future visitors. Aside from direct manipulations, the greatest danger to this era comes from items left behind by level 1 travelers, including weapons, chronogear, supply caches, remote surveillance devices, and observation stations.

CT LEVEL 1: Basic time travel becomes possible at level 1. Usually, it results from the efforts of crackpot/genius inventors or misguided government experiments. The equipment is primitive, notoriously unreliable, and accidents are common. One-shot timecans, time projectors with limited range and duration, one-way portals and oddball homemade vehicles (got a DeLorean, anyone?) are all methods utilized. Timescanners (devices which can see into different times) and timescoops (which can pull items out of other times) are also feasible, but most other types of chronotechnology are almost nonexistent. Time theory is virtually unknown, leading to possible disruption of the timestream by careless visitors.

Travelers from this era are typically lone adventurers, cranks, and fanatics, and more organized groups of scientists, explorers, and military personnel. They are equipped with anything from obsolete firearms (Victorian Age) to 20th century conventional weapons, but little else.

This period comes to an end when technology advances, and a more centralized group becomes responsible for time travel.

CT LEVEL 2: This is the level where the characters based in Jolly's campaign probably come from. Time-travel is based on projectors or other well-defended fixed installations like gates or tunnels. It is usually reliable, although the theory behind it is not always fully understood. Level 2 time travel begins to become available in the not-too-distant future.

Personal equipment is well-developed, although it tend to be bulky. Agents are skilled in combat and use of scanning devices to detect temporal fluxes. Time agencies are typical of secret government agencies; bureaucratic, with lots of money, but technical and personal difficulties limit the number of people they can send into the past.

Level 2 agencies are mostly involved in suppressing time-terrorists and cleaning up the messes left by level 1 travelers. In some cases several rival time agencies compete to adjust the time-lines in their favor, often causing further temporal disruptions. Although well-meaning, level 2 agencies may sometimes cause more harm than good in their manipulations of time.

CT LEVEL 3: This level is characterized by an time police or patrol who possess efficient time vehicles, and a network of agents throughout the time lines, with numerous bases and stations. They are capable of erecting time barriers effective against lower level equipment, and thus remain undetectable to them.

They're often involved in sophisticated actions to repair the fabric of time, but can be sometimes be found fighting a virtual time war against highly organized and powerful cliques, who are intent on changing the past on a massive scale. Level 3 agencies normally do not cause major temporal dislocations, but they are not perfect, and mistakes do happen. The specialize in producing the most capable agents possible, and keeping overhead and administration support to a minimum.

Level 3 technology is found in the distant future. Equipment includes energy weapons and advanced time devices, but even more important is the special training agents receive which allows them to effectively pose as natives of any era, learn quickly, compe-

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tently operate and repair their gear, and use numerous combat skills. Sophisticated implants and psycho-conditioning are also utilized.

At the end of this period level 3 personnel may become so advanced that they may be difficult to communicate with.

CT LEVEL 4: From the very distant future, this represents the most advanced time-travelling culture. Although they may be highly evolved and time-sensitive, Level 4 travelers usually appear as ordinary humans to avoid notice. They are master technicians and historians, and have an immense storehouse of knowledge, but their greatest asset is the ability to accurately predict what the actions of their adversaries will be, and take steps beforehand to forestall them. They are capable of impressive mental and physical feats.

Level 4 societies have a deep understanding of time theory and applications and can manipulate time at will, being able to "bend" the Laws of Time if necessary. Usually they prefer not to interfere in the past, but continually observe the timestreams for major dislocations. Some groups are more active, making many subtle interventions. This is generally done by a few independent but highly skilled agents. Control of time travel is an intrinsic part of this society's government, and there are no separate time agencies. Level 4 groups make few errors, but when they do, the scene is not pretty.

Renegades from level 4 are extremely dangerous but fortunately are very rare.

Level 4 travelers possess an exceptional array of compact space/time vehicles and chronoequipment. Their base/ship/homeworld is protected by an impenetrable time shield.

Time Travel Encounters

Whenever PCs travel in time, there is the possibility of a temporal encounter. Check for each trip; the chance should vary from 1-10%. When the party is forced to make very hasty time journeys without proper preparation the chance should be doubled or tripled. Note that this list can be used for time travel encounters for characters who remain in their own time.

The encounter can be selected by the GM or rolled randomly on 1d20.

ENCOUNTERS

1. Sentinel/Watchman: A operative who works from static location in time and space, usually a small, carefully camouflaged station. He monitors the surrounding area for temporal activity. Some sentinels work undercover, posing as ordinary citizens. (CT level 1-4)

2. Guardian/Ranger/Warden: A mobile operative, patrolling a band of time, and intervening when trouble occurs or assistance is needed. (CT level 3-4)

3. Agent: A specially trained expert in intervention. The agent has sophisticated equipment or mental powers that prevent detection by less powerful rival agencies. He is indistinguishable from a native. Agents do not operate in a specific period of time for long, but are dispatched on missions as needed. (CT level 2-4)

4. Strike Team: A heavily armed group of military trained operatives. They do not attempt to remain undercover, but attack quickly and with great force. (CT level 2–3)

5. Robot: Certain time agencies make use of robots because of their resistance to subjective temporal influences and their neutral equilibria in affecting the timestream. Some robots will resemble humans or animals closely to avoid attracting attention, but they can spotted by experts. Others are obvious mechanical devices. They are not very smart, but their durability and efficiency at killing, make them ideal for termination missions. (CT level 2-3)

6. Malfunction: The party's chronogear has broken down. Effects are up to the GM. Malfunction may lead to accidents (see below).

7. Accident: The party has had a time accident. They may have encountered another time vehicle, some temporal obstruction (possibly deliberate), or a physical object. Damage to the PC's and their time vehicle will occur. Note that aging can be a form of time damage; or a PC might be affected such that he rapidly evolves or devolves. An accident might cause a paradox (below).

8. Paradox/Anomaly/Discontinuity: The most common paradox is entering a period of time where the PC's already exist, thus creating a very big problem. Aside from the chance of instant annihilation, there are interesting possibilities about the PC's future and past selves interacting in various ways . . . but the GM better have this figured out beforehand.

Another is the creation of unintended timelines or alternate probabilities very dif-

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ferent than what the characters wanted, and having an effect on their own lives. They may return to find their own world completely changed or even nonexistent.

Characters might be affected by a temporal fugue. They become unstuck in time, and start skipping back and forth from one period to another. Or they might start living at a highly accelerated (or slowed) rate. Fast-living PC's will see the world as being frozen in time, while slow-living ones will appear to be comatose to others.

Also possible is the creation of a Timeloop — a closed period of repeating time, where the characters are forced to reenact their actions again and again. Breaking the loop requires outside intervention or the discovery of the key action in the loop which must then be preformed differently than before. Almost inevitably, the changing the key action is something that leads to undesirable results for the PC's. Timeloops can be generated by advanced chronotechnologies, or occur by chance.

9. Explorer: A time-traveler who is interested in research and possible exploitation of a particular period. Many explorers are responsible scientists, but some are self-seeking entrepreneurs who are insensitive to any harm they may inflict on the timestream and are out to steal valuable items. (CT level 1-4)

10. Time Tourists/Safari: Visitors from another time, led by an entrepreneur or time-travel agency guide, who wish to witness some historic event or participate in an activity not possible in their own time (like hunting dinosaurs). Although they are prohibited from interfering in the past, tourists are notorious for causing trouble. (CT level 1-4)

11. Lost Traveler(s): Time travelers, possibly tourists, agents or explorers who have been stranded due to hostile forces, accidents, or malfunctions. They will be grateful for help, but some may also be dangerous, as they will attempt to conquer the less advanced beings of the time they've been thrown into.

Occasionally there will be embittered exiles from other periods who have marooned for their crimes. (CT 1-4)

12. Time Sensitives: Beings who are attuned to the temporal state, and can naturally detect the use of time affecting devices. Under certain conditions, they can travel time themselves. They may be aliens or humans with psionic powers.

13. Time Marauders: These are aliens or warlike barbarians who have somehow gotten hold of a time machine and are intent on invading the timelines for plunder, slaves, technology, or a better place to live. Usually they are poorly equipped, organized, trained, and led, but appear in large numbers. However, there is a chance they might be superior forces of a dictatorship bent on conquest. (CT level 1-4)

14. Inadvertent Time Travelers: People who have accidentally traveled time due to misuse of technology, magic, mental powers, unfortunate encounters with powerful entities or natural anomalies, malfunctioning hyperdrives in their spacecraft, etc. They are in even worse shape than lost travelers as they don't understand what happened and don't have any idea how to get back home. Those who are flexible and enterprising will get along quite well in their new times, and may even become quite powerful. The rest will be lucky to survive. This category can also include items or creatures from distant eras that have been misplaced in time, often with far-reaching effects.

15. Chronons: Small creatures or particles who invade chronogear and temporal travel machines, causing them to function erratically. The malfunctions will be barely noticeable as first, but progressively get worse. They will eventually disable or destroy the equipment.

16. Immortals: Strictly speaking, not time travelers, but persons who have an immense lifespan and other special abilities, and who remain hidden from the bulk of humanity (e.g., vampires). Thus the same individual could be encountered in period after period. Their acute senses make it likely that they would identify travelers as something out of the ordinary before they were recognized themselves. An alternative is persons (or creatures) who have "traveled" from the distant past by some kind of suspended animation- cryogenics, magical stasis, relativistic time dilation or just falling asleep for a few centuries. Then there is the odd individual who is living his life backwards in time.

17. Time Ghosts: Unusual manifestations of time, these ephemeral visions could be the anything from the spirits of lost travelers or dead people to character's psyches from alternate realities to random noise to bizarre creatures. Generally harmless, the GM can use them to inform, distract, warn, mislead, scare, or harass the party as he sees fit.

18. Time Elementals/Beasts/Creatures: Entities which exist in the realm of time. They are naturally capable of time travel and potent temporal manipulations and tend not to like interlopers. They can be anything from mindless monsters to benevolent (or merciless) near-omnipotent beings.

19. Time Winds: A natural phenomenon of time that can force travelers off-course, to a different location, period of time, and maybe even an alternative probability.

20. Renegades: Some of the worst possible adversaries. These include the time terrorists described by Jolly, plus various would-be conquerors and warped geniuses who may try to impersonate historical figures, kidnap people from different eras for cruel experiments or their menagerie of "primitives", or just mangle time for their own twisted ends. They are typically involved in diabolical schemes to gain mighty artifacts, power, or revenge, and have no compunction about using all the resources at their command to get their way. (CT1-4)

The following pages present an assortment of sample time travellers. ❑

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Bloody Hand (CT 0)

Occupation: Menial Work
Skills: Knife Use, Sneaking
Motivation: To Kill
Weakness: Psychotic
Equipment: Sharp Instruments

This individual had a dismal childhood of poverty and abuse. As he grew older, he found his imagination could bring relief from his miserable existence, but his thoughts were dark and disturbing. In fact, soon he began to suffer from frequent memory lapses. Bloodyhand is a natural time traveler whose bouts of amnesia cover periods where he unconsciously travels in time, committing crimes of horrific mayhem.

When in this state he exhibits superhuman strength, speed, and cunning. ❑

Dr. "Lightning" Volto (CT 1)

Occupation: Inventor
Skills: Gadgetry, Technical Mumbo-jumbo
Motivation: Dreams of Fame
Weakness: Somewhat Batty
Equipment: Camera, Notepad

Dr. Volto is a disreputable scientist who has been drummed out of several professional societies for his hair-brained theories. Determined to prove his critics wrong, he has put together a working time device (partly by luck). He is set to begin a series of haphazard experiments without really thinking through the consequences. However, certain rivals do take him seriously, and are watching his every move. ❑

Philip T. Winslow (CT 1)

Occupation: Millionaire
Skills: Business, Persuasion
Motivation: Outdo Others
Weakness: Arrogance
Equipment: Tape recorder, Gold Coins

Winslow spent huge sums of money for the creation of a usable, if somewhat crude, time machine. He plans to use it for his own personal edification, and also as an advertising gimmick. The possibility he may cause harm to others has not entered his mind; if it did, it wouldn't bother him in the least. ❑

Colonel Talbot Briggs (CT 2)

Occupation: Soldier
Skills: Small Arms, Tactics
Motivation: Defend Nation
Weakness: Very Blunt and Aggressive
Equipment: Submachine gun, Grenades

Colonel Briggs is the officer the government has placed in command of it's top secret time travel project. He is uncomfortable around the "egghead" scientists who run the equipment and make up a good part of the exploration teams, considering them to be too easily distracted from the mission. When trouble appears, his first reaction is to bring maximum firepower to bear. ❑

Professor Arthur Hillson (CT 2)

Occupation: Chief Time-ologist
Skills: Time Theory, Physics, Admin.
Motivation: Advancement of Science
Weakness: Overcautious
Equipment: Portable Computer

Hillson is the head of the Time Study Institute. He spends most of his days restraining the enthusiasm of the junior scientists who want to jump into the past. He has developed a plan for a slow, careful, and methodical exploration of the timestream. He is extremely concerned about the unexplained disappearance of some chronogear. ❑

TimeWarden ZR-4 (CT 3)

Occupation: Time Intervention Specialist
Skills: Chronotechnology, Combat
Motivation: Protect the Timelines
Weakness: Optimism
Equipment: Ion pistol, Paralyzation rod

A top operative of the TimePatrol, ZR-4 specializes in the Ancient and Medieval Periods. He enjoys his work and has been given a number of decorations and promotions.

Although ZR-4 is conscientious about his job, he once had an accident that may have sent some bystanders into another time. An emergency occupied his attention, he failed to investigate the incident, and his superiors also overlooked it. ❑

Kraxus the Warlord (CT 3)

Occupation: Ex-dictator
Skills: Technology, Hypnotism, Torture
Motivation: Megalomania
Weakness: Revenge, Delusions of Grandeur
Equipment: Death Ray

Kraxus is a vicious tyrant who escaped imminent apprehension in his own age by using an experimental time machine of his own construction. He plans to impose his ambitions on people in other time periods, building up an army to make his return in force. He generally finds it difficult to kill anyone without first haranguing them on his past glories and anticipated triumphs. ❑

The Yergalac (CT3)

Occupation: Alien Creepies
Skills: Weaponry, Destruction
Motivation: Conquest
Weakness: Strict Adherence to the Plan
Equipment: Anti-matter Bomb

The Yergalac are alien creatures who loath all other intelligent life forms, considering themselves far superior. After devastating their own world in a war, they are investigating the timestream, seeking new worlds to inhabit. Naturally, any indigenous sapients must be eliminated first. After coming up with a suitable program of conquest, all their operations are placed under the command of a picked leader, whom the others follow slavishly. ❑

Zeta (CT 4)

Occupation: Adventurer
Skills: Science, History, Disguise, Repartee
Motivation: Save Innocent Lives
Weakness: Soft-hearted
Equipment: Universal Tool

Zeta is a non-descript, diminutive woman of indeterminate age who easily blends into crowds and gatherings of any social class. She enjoys jaunting through time in her travel machine, visiting many worlds and periods. She never carries weapons, but is adept at nullifying or sabotaging those of others.

Through design or chance, she often appears at temporal nexuses at critical times, preventing time disasters by brilliant manipulations. ❑

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Director's Overview

The brave members of the Space Patrol of the 26th century are sent to the planet Zeldar to investigate the disappearance of a survey team sent there several months before. Zeldar, it seems, was just discovered by the Space League, and had suffered the effects of an atomic war several years before.

When they get to Zeldar, the Actors are greeted by beautiful women in silver lamè bikinis, and taken to the palace of Queen Altaria, who denies any knowledge of the previous team. But she has something she wants the Actors to do.

Zeldar, it seems, has no men, because they all died in the Atomic War, and Queen Altaria wants the Actors to stay to help rebuild the population. If the Actors resist, she will threaten them, but only carefully.

The palace is attacked by horrible mutants, which the Actors must fight off. Altaria points this out as a sign that the Actors have to stay to help protect them against further mutant attacks.

Skulking around the castle after the attack, the Actors find evidence that the first survey team was here, and that something awful happened to them. Confronting Altaria with this information, a fight breaks out and one of the guards' masks comes off, reveling the horrible, decayed face underneath. All of Zeldar's women are affected this way, she explains, but their children won't be. Their few remaining scientists have assured her of this.

So what if the members of the previous team mutated from radiation poisoning after being with them for only a little while? After this, if the Actors resist the Zeldarian Queen's advances, she has them all thrown in the dungeons to reconsider their position. At this point, if the players can't figure out a way to escape of their own, introduce the sympathetic Zeldarian girl to help them escape Altaria's grasp.

At this point, the Actors will have to make up their minds whether to simply escape or to try to foil Queen Altaria's nefarious plans, but you as Director might want to stress that there is little they can do to stop her plans except flee, since her plans hinge on their cooperation or at least presence.

Make sure, though, that the flight back to the spaceship is fraught with peril as Altaria discovers their escape and unleashes her captive mutants to bring them back, dead or alive. the Actors will also have to fight their way past Altaria's cadre of spear-toting Amazons.

Setting

Bikini Monsters of the Atomic Planet takes place on the planet Zeldar, the fourth planet out circling Betelgeuse. Zeldar is a scarred wasteland after a devastating nuclear war, inhabited by the last few women left alive after the War and horrible, cannibalistic mutants who'd love to find out what a Space Patrolman tastes like.

Most of the movie takes place in or near the palace of Queen Altaria, the hereditary ruler of Zeldar. the castle is a huge affair, with vaulting ceilings, arabesque–shaped doorways and everything in vague pastel colors. Underneath the palace are Altaria's dungeons, where she keeps captured mutants. This area has low ceilings, square doorways, and nary a touch of pastel to be seen.

Cast

The Actors take the part of members of the Space Patrol, the combination exploration and police force of the 26th century. This movie may be played using the same roles as **Bjorn on the Bayou** from *Late Show II*. Whether the events in this movie happen before or after that movie is entirely up to your discretion: the two are designed to be independent of each other.

Captain: the role of the Captain of the spaceship should definitely go to the Actor with the highest FAME. The Captain should also be Expert Talent Coached in the Leadership talent.

Scientist: Not the mad scientist of many science-fiction movies, the ship's scientist is more of a jack-of-all trades. He may also serve as the ship's Doctor and dispense with certain liquid painkillers not approved of by the Space League when the Captain isn't watching. The role of the Scientist should go to whichever Actor has the highest Talents in various Sciences or the highest Brains.

Navigator: This role should go to whoever has highest Talent in Spaceships. If no one has this role, it should go to the Actor with the highest DEX. The Navigator always seems to be the cast member most adamant about trying out some of the Scientist's liquid painkillers.

Security Chief: This role should go to the Actor with the highest Talent in Rifle.

One player should also be in charge of keeping an eye on Einstein, the ship's mascot and shameless act of pandering towards the youngsters in the audience.

Besides these roles, which are filled out by the Actors, there are thirty Extras who round out the crew of the spaceship. These are here primarily to get killed by Mutants and anything else unfriendly the Actors encounter.

Props and Wardrobe

The SLSS Bellepherone: The biggest prop in Bikini Monsters of the Atomic Planet is, of course, the space saucer, the SLSS Bellepherone. It is a typically huge saucer-shaped ship replete with glowing lights and has no visible power source. It lands by putting down huge landing pods on the surface. In case of combat, it has a deluxe-size version of the Atomic Pistol discussed below (DP: 1000).

Uniform: All members of the Space Patrol come equipped with a nifty silver and gray uniform trimmed with rose. If anyone asks, they are made from the miracle cloth of the 26th century, Plasticloth.

Atomic Pistols: All Space Patrolmen are also armed with a Space League Atomic Pistol (DP: 20). When fired, an Atomic Pistol's fluted barrel glows bright red and anything its beam strikes explodes in a shower of sparks. A high-pitched whining noise is also heard.

After that, props should be handed out according to the roles the various Actors have adopted for this movie:

Navigator: Logbook

Scientist: Geiger Counter, Hip Flask of Synthetic Whiskey

Security Chief: Space League Atomic Rifle (DP=40), Megaphone

Monsters:

Queen Altaria

Size: 5' 10" **Brains:** 20
Speed:100 **Fame:** 20
Build: 20 **FX Roll:** 60
SP: 50 **Damage:** 20
Talents: Leadership **Combat FX:** Spear
Other FX: Seduction
Immunities and Weaknesses:
Props: Gold lamè bikini, crown, trident
Description: Queen Altaria really isn't a bad person, she is just getting awfully desperate to have some children before the entire Zeldarian race dies off because of their nuclear folly.
Characterization: Altaria is a woman of great strength, holding some last few flickers of hope alive for her race. She is reasonable

on most other subjects, but is still very vain, and is bothered by the fact that she has the complexion of week–old hamburger.

Co–Stars

Zenobia

Size:	5' 6"	**Brains:**	10
Speed:	80	**Fame:**	20
Build:	15	**FX Roll:**	60
SP:	50	**Damage:**	20

Talents: Spear
Combat FX: Spear
Other FX: none
Immunities and Weaknesses: normal
Props: Silver lamè bikini, spear

Description: Zenobia is the first Zeldarian the Actors will meet, a lovely brunette in her early twenties. Unlike most of the Zeldarians, Zenobia is against forcing the Actors to give them children. She also will take a shine to one of the cast members, perhaps the one with the highest Looks other than the one Queen Altaria decides she likes. Of course, since she is a sympathetic character, she isn't as badly disfigured as the rest of the Zeldarian women.

Characterization: Zenobia is a sweetheart, and can melt the hearts of any male that comes her way without even realizing she's doing it.

Extras

Einstein: Einstein is a monkey, dressed in a scaled-down version of the Actors' uniforms. He is a sort of ship's mascot. **Talents:** none

Doc Ferguson: the last remaining member of the first survey team. The Actors will meet him while being held in Queen Altaria's dungeons. **Talents:** Nuclear Physics.

Crew of the SLSS Bellepherone: These do the duties that the Actors don't want to have to take care of during the movie, including dying. **Talents:** Pistol.

Zeldarian Girl-Monsters: These are outwardly beautiful women in skimpy silver lamè bikinis, armed with spears and nets. But like Queen Altaria, they all wear masks to hide the horrible effects radiation has had on them (oddly, their bodies are completely unaffected). **Talents:** Spear

Zeldarian Mutants: These are all the Zeldarians who not only mutated, they went crazy from the radiation. Now they sneak around trying to drag off the Zeldarian women for purposes best left to the imagination. Like all good mutants, Zeldarian mutants have the complexion of cold oatmeal. Their eyes glow, too. **Talents:** Stealth, Wrestling

Suggested Events

Planetfall

In the 26th century, you are all members of a brave elite: the Space Patrol. Entrusted to you is the responsibility of guarding the spaceways and contacting new races to join the Space League. One such new race lives on the planet Zeldar, circling the red giant Betelgeuse. The Space League became aware that Zeldar was home to sentient life several months ago and dispatched a survey team to make first contact. But there has been no word from the team since it landed, and the Space Authority fears the worst. It's your job to go to Zeldar and find out what happened, without letting whatever happened to them occur to you.

You are now in orbit around Zeldar, making your last approach. As your saucer enters the atmosphere, your Visi-Screen reveals a horrible sight: Zeldar is no paradise. The clouds you have just passed through are thick with soot, and all you can see all the way to the horizon is a barren, scorched wasteland, with smoke curling up slowly from bonfires that had once been cities.

Einstein, the ship's pet monkey, draws your attention to the long-range Geiger counter, which has started ticking frantically. Zeldar is very radioactive.

Far on the horizon, you can see a mountain with what looks like an intact castle built on its summit, surrounded by a delicate pink glow.

Take Me To Your Leader

Finding a landing spot is no problem: everything around the castle is burnt flat. As the Actors' saucer lands, they can see a procession of gorgeous women in silver lamè bikinis coming down the mountain to meet them. All are armed with spears.

The leader of this little procession introduces herself as Zenobia, and requests that the Actors accompany her. (She speaks perfect English of course. Some 'first contact.') Faced with several spears and scantily-clad women, it is safe to assume that the Actors will comply. The procession, with the Actors in tow, winds its way back up the mountain, but all is not completely well. As the party is passing through a narrow gulch, growls are heard and a few mutants attack.

Zeldarian Mutants
SP: 10
FX Roll: 55
Damage: 10

This should be pretty easy for the Actors to clean up, but will prompt the normal round of questions as to what these oatmeal-faced mutants are. To which Zenobia replies:

"These are all that is left of many of out brave people after the War. There are very few of us left. . . unaffected."

If the Actors ask Zenobia why she paused before saying that "unaffected," she shakes her head and says that everything will be explained to them soon.

As the group approaches the castle, the pink glow around it becomes easier to see. If asked what it is, Zenobia explains that the glow is a force field to keep out the mutants. when they get closer, she touches a glowing disc set into a stone by the side of the road and a hole appears in the force field, just large enough to let the party through. After all have passed through, the hole closes, sealing the force field shut.

Audience With the Queen

Once inside the castle, you are taken to a huge room, whose ceiling arches high above you. On balconies looking down at you are hundreds more women like Zenobia and her little band. At the far end of the room, high on a throne, sits a woman even more beautiful than the rest. She is dressed in a gold lamè bikini and a crown rests on top of her platinum curls. She rises to greet you as you are directed to stand in front of her throne. She speaks: "I am Queen Altaria. Welcome, off-worlders, to the planet Zeldar."

After the formalities of meeting royalty, the Actors will eventually get to the point of asking about the previous team. Altaria denies having heard anything about them, but points out that if they landed elsewhere on the planet, the mutants could have gotten them. Queen Altaria then invites the Actors to stay as long as they wish. She will also single out one male Actor (the one with the highest Looks) to pay special amounts of attention to.

After a few days of the Actors skulking around accomplishing nothing, Queen Altaria makes her move, inviting them to stay indefinitely enjoying the comforts of the castle. While more lecherous Actors might see interesting possibilities in the invitation, the rock-jawed men of the Space Patrol are meant to be better than that (Yeah, right. Sailors are

sailors, in the navy or in space, and this is shaping up to be one incredible port-of-call).

Mutant Attack

The next night, as the Actors sleep, they are awakened by screams of terror. Rushing out of their rooms, they see mutants swarming through the halls, attacking anyone in sight.

There are lots of mutants, but they seem strangely weak. There are three mutants for every Actor.

Zeldarian Mutants
SP: 6
FX Roll: 55
Damage: 8

After the attack, they are summoned to Altaria's personal quarters, where an attendant (in a white lamè bikini) is dressing to her wounds. Altaria uses the attack as further proof that the Actors need to stay, to protect them from further mutant attacks.

Skulking Around the Castle

Altaria uses all her charms to keep the Actors a few days more, promising to get them real food to eat on the way back, rather than the artificial food the ship creates using its computer.

If the Actors are still trying to find out from Altaria, she keeps fending them off with claims of ignorance. If they try to find out anything more, go to "The Secret Room."

If the Actors haven't tried to find out more about the disappearance of the first survey team by now, use the following ploy: Einstein getting away from his keeper and fleeing down a hallway.

If the Actors pursue (and if they don't, use one of my Audience Asides to tell them to follow the little simian plot device!), Einstein leads them down to a more deserted part of the castle, and finally scampers into a darkened room, chattering in excitement.

The Secret Room

When you switch on the lights in this room, it is obvious that it has been recently occupied. The dust has been disturbed here. The room is empty except for a plastic chest resting against the far wall. If Einstein had to lead them to this room, he is sitting on top of the chest and pointing down at it.

If the Actors open the chest, read the following:

Inside are tattered and discarded clothes. When you pick them up, they are silver and gray uniforms of the same sort that you wear, inscribed with the insignia of the ***SLSS Castillaine.*** *The Castillaine was the ship the first survey team arrived on.*

If for some reason the Actors have lost their weapons, they will find the weapons from the crew of the Castillaine in the bottom of the chest. Strangely, none have been discharged. If the Scientist happens to use a Geiger counter on the garments, they will be revealed a highly radioactive.

The Truth Unmasked

If the Actors confront Altaria with this evidence of her duplicity, she admits that she lied and explains:

"All our men are dead, killed in the War, and we are a dying race. When your survey team arrives, it seemed like a sign of deliverance. Perhaps we could have children, untainted by the radioactivity that poisons our world. But they died before anything could happen. Now you must take their place."

If the Actors resist, Altaria motions her troops forward to ensure the Actors' compliance, at spear point if necessary. Let the Actors have room to resist, because:

As you grapple with the guard, something happens to her face. It rips, then falls away, revealing her true face, which is hideously scarred and black with radiation.

At this point, have all the Actors who can see the unmasking make FAME rolls. Those who fail must make rolls on the Fear Table, the sight is so horrifying.

Altaria speaks: *"So now you know our secret. That's right. We are all like this. None escaped the War without some effects." She reaches up and takes off her own mask, revealing a face even more hideously scarred than the rest. "Even I was affected. Those of us inside the force field weren't as harmed as those outside, who have become mutants, but we are all this way now."*

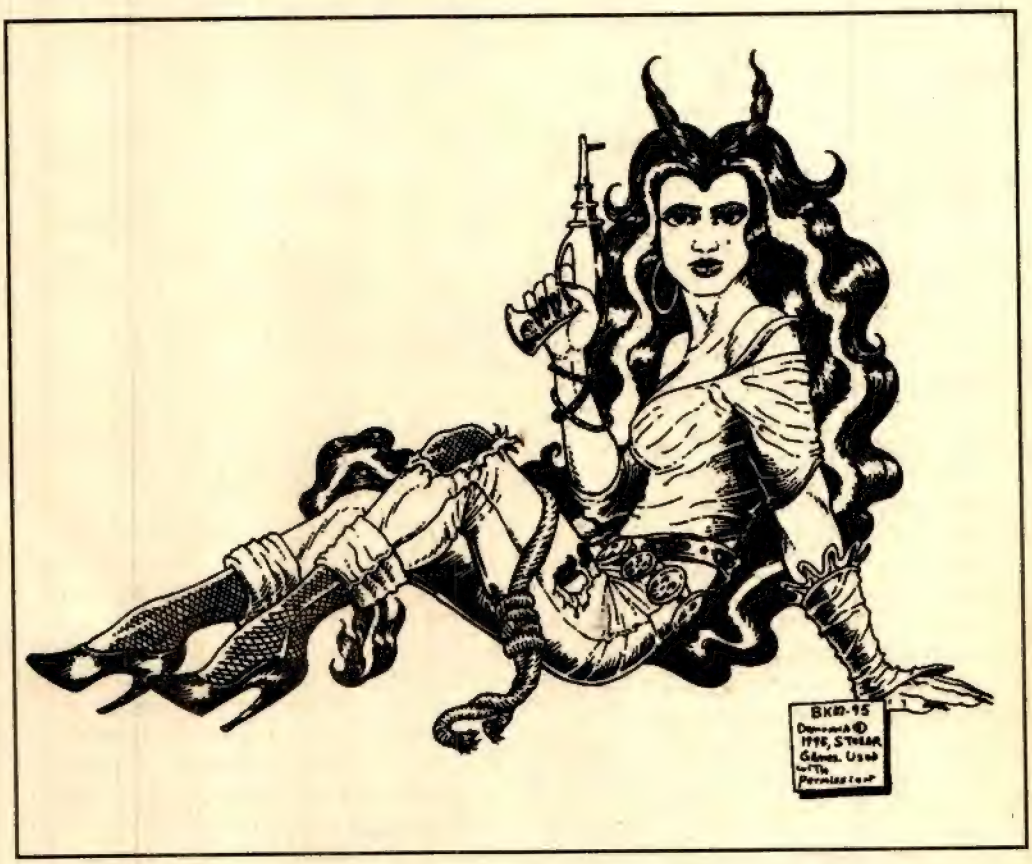
She continues: *"You see why we are so desperate. Will you help us, in spite of our . . . appearances?"* She goes on to explain that while they are all hideously scarred from the radiation, her scientists have assured her the next generation will be all right, ensuring the survival of the Zeldarian race.

The answer, of course, is no, unless the players are extremely perverse.

Queen Altaria nods sadly. *"I feared that would be your answer. Perhaps a while in our dungeons will change your minds."*

The First Survey Team

Once locked in their cells, the Actors find they have a cellmate, Doc Ferguson, the last



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surviving member of the first survey team. Doc is in pretty bad shape, as he is dying of radiation poisoning. Play up his coughing and wheezing; if the Scientist still has any of his "liquid painkiller" handy, now would be a time to give some to the Doc.

"They fooled us with their masks, too. But we (cough) found we were all dying from the (wheeze) radiation from them within a few weeks. I figure I'm not too long for this life, either (cough, cough)." As he finishes speaking, Doc's eyes flutter shut and do not re-open.

If anyone bothers to check his pulse, he's gone. No surprise there.

The Great Escape

While ensconced in the dungeons, the Actors find what's left of the previous team, horribly mutated and dying from contact with the Zeldarian women. If they can't find a way out (and are unwilling to simply do a "film Break") Zenobia slips down to free them, explaining that not all of the Zeldarians are as cruel as Altaria.

If the Actors Can Escape On Their Own:

No sooner have you escaped from your cells than you hear a soft voice calling your names. Zenobia steps out of the shadows, smiling in relief. "I came down here to help you, but I see you've gotten out already. Please, don't be afraid. I am a friend. But you must escape," she whispers as she leads you to the exit, "because Altaria plans to use one of the last weapons from the War, a Disintegration Beam, on your saucer to prevent you from being able to leave. But those weapons haven't been used for years. I'm afraid what will happen if she tries to use it."

Getting To the Saucer

It looks like you're going to make your getaway safely when you hear a shout from behind you. "The prisoners are escaping! Get them! Free the Mutants!"

Zenobia cries that it is not far to a secret escape tunnel, but you must hurry. As if emphasize her point, a spear comes hurtling over your heads, to land with a "thunk" just ahead of you. You can hear other spears landing, but none have found a target, yet.

If any of the Actors turn to look, tell them they see a mutant, the largest they've seen yet, coming stomping up the hallway after them. Altaria wants them back, preferably alive, but if that isn't possible, she obviously isn't going to lose any sleep over it.

If they try to fight it:

Big Zeldarian Mutant
SP: 100
Combat FX: Crush
Other FX: Armor (10)
FX Roll: 50
Damage: 30

There are also numerous spear-toting Zeldarian women, none wearing their masks now, right on his heels. Altaria is not with them, though.

Once they arrive at the saucer, Zenobia begs the Actors to take her with them, since to defy Altaria the way she has is a sure death penalty.

As your saucer lifts off, a crimson beam of energy strikes the ground right where you had rested only moments before. A second later, the castle explodes, showering debris everywhere. Zenobia turns from the Visi-screen with a sob.

A Last Surprise

Whichever Actor has become most attached to Zenobia will eventually have to ask the fateful question, since she hasn't taken off her mask yet, even once the saucer is in orbit.

Zenobia nods, and takes off her mask, to reveal . . . that her face is unscarred. Exit on swelling music as Zenobia and her beau embrace.

The End?

The camera travels back to the ruins of the castle, which have stopped smoking. In the debris is Altaria's mask, slightly scorched around the edges. A feminine hand reaches from off-screen, picks it up, and puts it on. Fade to Black.

Cast Party

As well as standard rewards for superior play, you may consider giving bonus FAME points for the following.

—One FAME point to whomever thought of the successful escape plan

—One FAME point to whichever Actor was the focus of Altaria's attentions

—One FAME point to whichever Actor was fighting the guard when her mask came off

—One FAME point to whomever fought and killed the most Mutants during the movie

—One FAME point to whomever acted out the role of the Captain

—One FAME point to whomever Zenobia took a shine to

—Two FAME points to whomever didn't groan out loud at this turkey.

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A Twist of Fate

A Highlander: the Card Game Short Story

By Neal Reynolds © 1995

Shadows and darkness seemed to ooze all around him as Slan Quince stalked down the alleyway. A lightning bolt screamed a jagged path to the pavement next to him, throwing up dirt and asphalt in a hellfire shower. He felt tiny jolts of electricity dance across his black metal face plate, then move in quick spirals down his body, along his arm, and out of the tip of the massive, bloody sword held limply at his side.

"One down."

"And that will be your last, Slan," warned Connor McLeod as he stepped from around the corner.

"You think so, Highlander? You really think so?" said Slan. He then began to pace the alleyway in front of Connor, musing to himself, "Let's see here, I have just sent Flannery's head flying into that trash bin over there, and if I remember correctly, last time we met, you ran away by jumping off the bridge."

Slan stopped pacing, looked at Connor for a second, then, shrugging, said, "Well, if you say that it's my last, then I may as well go home." Suddenly, Slan brought up his sword and fired the dagger that was loaded in the pommel directly at his opponent.

Connor quickly dodged the flying blade, sliding forward and drawing his katana in one smooth action. Slan followed his sneak attack by lunging two huge steps forward and bringing his sword in a whistling arc toward Connor's head. Connor swung his blade up to block the powerful blow, and the two blades met with a crack that shot out in all directions, causing the puddles in the street to shake with the sound's intensity. Quickly Connor took the offensive, sliding his sword down the blade to bite into Slan's hand. Snarling, Slan backed away and brought his sword up to block the Scotsman's swings as he pressed the advantage. Connor came in from every direction, hoping to land a few serious blows and end this contest quickly. Slan, not liking to be put on the defensive, stepped into one of Connor's slashes and shoved him against the far wall. He then brought his blade into a low flying attack at Connor's legs. Connor swung his sword down and to the left, ringing a blow off Slan's mask, as he jumped over the ebony sword. With rage born of this near–fatal encounter, Slan rose up and twirled around with his two-handed sword outstretched, and with all his strength aimed a blow at Connor's neck. Connor again swung his sword up to block the oncoming attack. This time the hand-crafted Japanese blade shattered as it was hit by the force of a train. Maintaining the attack as his sword blew through his opponent's defense, Slan cleanly severed the head of the Highlander and watched as it bounced down the alley.

Slan stood over Connor's heap waiting. Soon, the wind rose up, funneling down the street with hurricane force. Lightning showered down, crackling in from all directions to lance into Slan's massive frame. The electricity writhed about him, exploding street lamps and transformers, shattering windows, and jumping between stalled or abandoned cars. After a short while the maelstrom subsided, as small hairs or energy bounced along the gutters and car engines until there was silence.

Slan stumbled back a step, barely able to keep his footing as the ecstasy left his body. He looked around to see bursts of sparks sprinkling down from the torn up street light, cars aflame, and several caved-in roofs where lightning from the two storms turned their support beams to slag. Slan glanced down and noticed the huge chunk that Connor's blade had taken out of his own. The gigantic blade was ruined, but Slan re-sheathed it anyway and unsteadily walked forward.

After he regained his senses, he began to laugh. Low and slowly at first, but building with intensity until he was bellowing and clutching at his stomach. When he his fit of mirth subsided, he reached up and removed the mask, wiping away a tear that had begun to slither its way down his cheek.

"Two down."

Highlander: The Card Game is the first in the **SWORDMASTER™** series being put out by *Thunder Castle Games*. This collectible card game uses pictures and characters from the **Highlander** series to simulate a sword fight between two immortals.

The first edition of **Highlander: The Card Game** will focus on the popular television series starring Adrian Paul. In it, one can play a generic immortal, or choose to be a specific character by collecting the proper persona card. The characters available in the first edition include Duncan and Connor McLeod, Slan Quince, and Amanda. These personas will have special abilities, and are restricted to using only cards that match their persona. For example, a person playing Duncan cannot use a dodge that is slated for Amanda. Generic immortals have more flexibility since they are not restricted to specific persona cards, but they lack the special fighting styles of the characters. Two minor immortals will appear in each edition, having the special ability of using certain restricted cards from several different personas. This adds both options and flavor to the game.

Players start out with 15 cards in their hand, known as their "Ability," while their draw deck represents "Endurance." At the end of every turn, a player is able to refill his hand back up to his ability. Each time a player takes damage from his opponent, his hand size is reduced that many cards. For example, if Duncan scores a successful hit on Slan (which does 2 points of damage), Slan's hand size is now reduced to 13 (15 – 2). Thus, each wound inflicted lowers your ability (or hand size). Ability is also reduced when a player empties his draw deck. When this happens, the player loses 5 cards from his hand and re-shuffles his discard. He gets his second wind, but at a significant cost to his ability. Once a player starts a turn with no cards in his hand, he is dead. Of course, there is a quicker way of being defeated: losing your head (a special maneuver).

Highlander is a fast paced card game which will be enjoyed by all. The attack/defense play is truly reminiscent of a sword fight, and the players will be able to visualize the action. For fans of the movies and TV series, the actual footage used on the cards will make this a must-have for their collection. All in all, this looks to be an exciting new edition to the collectible card game market. ❑

Star Trek: the Conquering

A Multiplayer *Star Trek* Variant

by Karol Pajak © 1995 • Illustrated by Mark Poole © 1995

Many centuries ago, the Gatarian race came to its final evolutionary stage and, before leaving our space and time, set up the Citadel of Knowledge at the center of their empire. They knew that one day all of their achievements would be discovered. In order to prevent it from being received too soon, they placed obstacles in their space that only those who were ready would be able to overcome. Now you can pit yourself against your opponents to reach the Citadel and claim this sector and its technology for your people.

The Game

The Space Conquering is a board game variant for use with your **Star Trek: The Next Generation Customizable Card Game®** (hereafter **STCCG**) that can be played with one to six players on the **Conquering** board that was included in **SHADIS #17** (a smaller version appears later in this article). Using a two-dimensional rather than a one-dimensional playing space gives a greater "open space" feel to playing **Star Trek**. While these rules may seem daunting at first, realize that **The Space Conquering** plays like **STCCG** about 90% of the time, with changes only to match the nature of the two-dimensional board and multi-player nature of the game.

Just like in **STCCG**, each player first selects cards to seed this sector of the galaxy. Next, the players seed the board/sector, playing dilemmas under the mission cards. Players then move around the board, completing missions in an attempt to accumulate 100 points. Once a player has achieved 100 points, that player moves to the center of the board (at the citadel) to complete the final mission and win the game. It is important to note that the game does not end if a player runs out of cards: a player can only win by gaining the secrets of the Citadel. If a player runs out of cards, then they have simply run out of resources that their affiliation assigned to the project. Unless specified later in this article, all rules from **STCCG** apply normally to **The Space Conquering**.

The Deck

While your group can decide on any limit on deck size, we have found that a 70 or 75 card limit works very well. Each deck must have at least one outpost, and exactly seven missions (an additional mission is needed to seed the Citadel). All seeding cards (Artifacts, Missions, one Outpost, and Dilemmas) may make up at most half of your deck.

Placing Cards

In a game with more than two players, ownership of each card on the board may become unclear, especially once all of the missions/dilemmas are placed and the players' ships are moving around the board. To prevent confusion, do two things: first, when you play or move one of your cards, arrange the card so that it faces your starting Outpost. This way, each of the six players will have their cards facing their direction and it will be easy to identify the owner of each card. Secondly, take your time: if you are careful and methodical, you will not disturb the layout of the cards and mix them up. You do not need to be slow to be careful. Finally, card sleeves that have been labeled with a marker are an outstanding aid to keeping ownership clear.

Seeding the Sector

The first thing that each player does is to take the highest valued mission in their deck and place it on the Citadel (the owner chooses one in the event of a tie). You may want to place these missions off to the side of the board to be able to see all of the missions and to minimize clutter. Then, players select a starting position on one of the outside corner spaces (the "Places of Power" in the **Conquering**) and place their starting outpost on that space. Starting from a randomly selected player and proceeding clockwise, players place their missions onto the board. Each player may only place one mission in each of the six "subsectors" on the board. A subsector is defined as the area three spaces from (and including) the starting space to (but not including) the Citadel, as well as the three spaces to the immediate right of the first three spaces. The six sub-sectors can be seen on the map below. This rule encourages players to move all around the sector to complete their missions.

After all of the missions have been placed, the players will play dilemmas onto the missions in the sector as well as in the citadel. As usual, space dilemmas and planet dilemmas must be placed on their appropriate missions. Each player may only play two dilemmas onto each of the missions on the Citadel.

After all of the Dilemmas have been placed onto missions, each player may, in turn, place ships under the missions in the citadel. These are considered drone ships controlled by the Citadel and defending it from intruders. Each player may not play more than two ships per mission and may only play them onto the missions in the Citadel. See the section on the Citadel below for more details.

Empty Space

Any space in the sector without a mission on it is considered "empty space". Empty Space has a "span" of three. New Outposts can only be constructed in an empty space. When a mission is completed, it is removed from the board, creating an "empty space".

Game Play

This section is rather short because **The Space Conquering** plays like **STCCG**. Some cards have had their effects altered due to the two-dimensional nature of the game. These changes are listed below. Play proceeds normally until a player has accumulated 100 points and wishes to head for the Citadel.

The Citadel:

A player may cross the Citadel before accumulating 100 points; the Citadel is considered to have a span of seven. Combat cannot occur between players on the Citadel space.

To win the game, a player with 100+ victory points may enter the Citadel space and attempt to complete any one of the missions there. When a player does this, the player must advance past the Dilemma phase and the Drone phase before

attempting the mission. If the mission is a planet mission, then the order is: Drones, Dilemmas, Mission. If it is a space mission, then the order is: Dilemmas, Drones, Mission.

Dilemma Phase

This is unchanged.

Drone Phase

In the Drone Phase, all of the ships that were placed as drones on this mission come out of the Citadel to attack the player's ships. All of the ships thus placed are sorted by affiliation to create "waves". The current player chooses the order in which he or she wishes to deal with the drone waves. For each wave, each drone will "take on" one ship which is on the Citadel space. If there are more drones than player ships, the drones will begin doubling up after each ship gets assigned a drone. The player to the right of the current player declares the drone assignments. Ship to ship combat occurs normally, except that drones do not receive damage normally; a single hit destroys a drone. After a round of combat, the drones may be reassigned by the player to the right. The current player may retreat after any round of combat with the drones. If the current player decides to retreat, all of the previously destroyed drones will be reformed by the Citadel to await the next "visitor". When all of the drones assigned to a mission are destroyed, the drones will not be repaired, and the player may proceed towards the next phase.

Mission Phase

If the player survives the Drones and the Dilemmas, he or she may win the game by solving the mission that was selected. If the mission is successfully completed, the game is over.

Card Alterations

For playability, the rules on certain cards were changed to fit the nature of a two-dimensional board. If your play group can agree on a way to deal with these cards, go ahead.

Borg Ship — The Borg ship moves in a straight line towards the opposite end of the board. It will not choose a path that takes it through the Citadel, and will opt for the longest path it can take. The Borg Ship will choose the path to the "right" of the Citadel if there are two paths of equal distance.

Supernova — if it destroys a space, that space has a span of seven. Supernova cannot be played on the Citadel.

Where No One Has Gone Before — allows side to side "wrap around" for one ship and is discarded after use. The ship moves from one edge space to the edge space directly opposite it on the board. The ship so moving must pay all normal movement costs.

Suggested Changes:

Red Alert is discarded at the end of the turn on which it is played.

Raise the Stakes - If players do not wish to play for ante, we recommend that Raise the Stakes allow the owner of a discarded dilemma to retrieve any dilemma he or she owns and place it on a mission of their choice.

Limit Artifacts to one per type per person.

Limit these cards as follows: **Kivas Fajo**—2, **Res-Q**—2, **Palor Toff**—2.

These two cards are banned: **Q** and **Static Warp Bubble**. (Q is banned because of the difficulty in changing the entire board, unless all players agree to allow "him". Static Warp Bubble slows down game play extensively and should also only be allowed if all players agree.)

An Optional Rule

Players may decide not to assign all of their space dilemmas in order to "seed" them during play. Note that if you do this too much, you will make it easier to complete missions and will not be drawing useful cards as often from your play deck. This is a strategy best used sparingly. These dilemmas may only be played during your turn, are considered events, and can only be played onto "empty space", face down. If a ship (or ships) move onto a space with a dilemma, then they encounter the dilemma, turning it over and dealing with it. A dilemma played in this fashion is also considered an event for the purposes of card effects.

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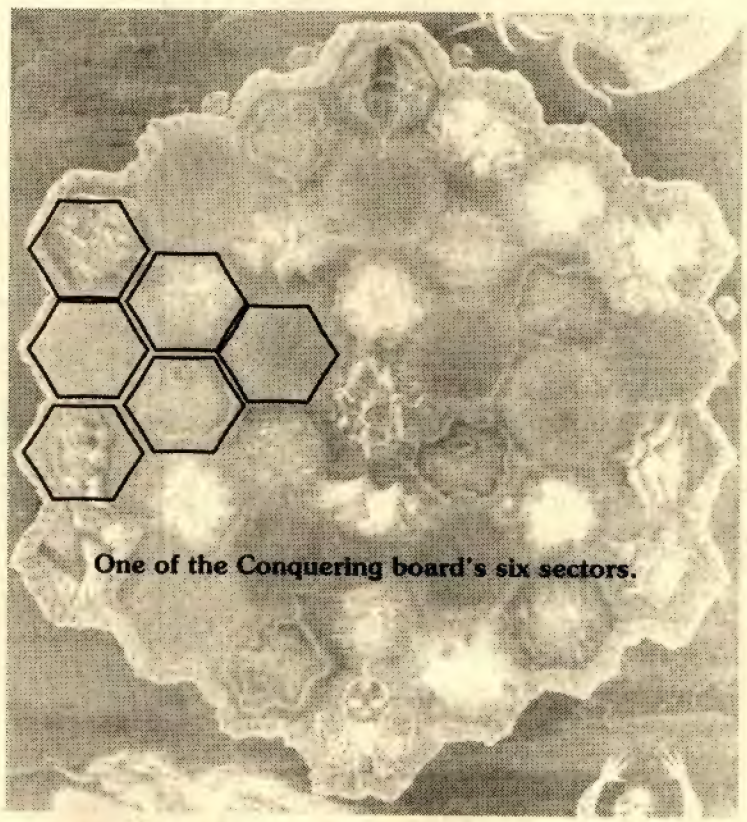


One of the Conquering board's six sectors.

More Multi-player ST:CCG

Official Variant Rules from Decipher Games

Introduction

Multi-player **ST:CCG** play (3 or 4 players) has been gaining in popularity and many people have submitted ideas to us for how best to do it. In this document I list some of the best suggestions we've received.

Please try them out, and let us know what you think! If you have some suggested refinements, or if you have completely different ways to play multiplayer, you are invited to send them in, and I will compile the best of them for inclusion in the next edition of this document.

Please send refinements or new suggestions to DAnswerMan@aol.com and please use the title "ST:CCG Multi-Player Variants" in the Subject of the email.

Of course, I will try to give credit to each person whose suggestion gets used (using your email name, or another form of credit of your choice). But please bear in mind that we get a lot of such suggestions and it isn't always easy to keep track or to tell what came first, etc., so don't flame me if I make a mistake! No compensation can be given for ideas submitted to this public forum other than recognition.

Notes on Converting Cards To Multiplayer Form

1) Multi-player games are recommended only for experienced players, because players will sometimes be required to remember who actually placed certain cards on the spaceline (such as Dilemmas). In the standard game, the players lay down the cards always facing them so it is easy to remember, but here that often isn't possible. **Note**: If you have trouble remembering, several players report that Post-It Pad sheets (by 3M, available in any office supply store, small size) make good markers on cards, and do not damage the cards.

2) The wording on most cards works fine when used for multiplayer play. Some unclear situations can arise when the card refers to "the opponent." Sometimes this should be read as "all" your opponents (as when it is meant to affect everyone), and at other times it means you should choose a specific opponent for it to apply to. Usually this context is obvious. If it isn't obvious, apply it to the player on your left.

Cards can also be unclear if they refer to the spaceline, since the "shape" of the spaceline is not a "line" in most of these variations. But again it is usually obvious how to "translate" them to the new spaceline.

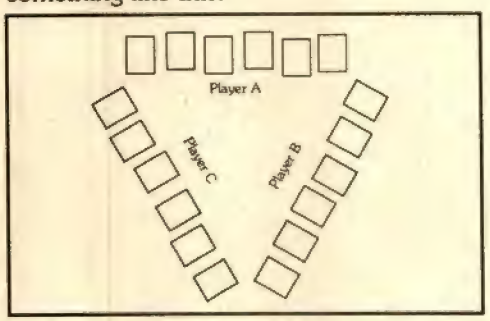
VARIATION #1: "Triangle and Square" Approach

3 or More Players

Suggested by: T2Thomas@aol.com and Voquih@netcom.com

This variation uses a spaceline in the shape of a triangle (3 players). The description here is for 3, but 4 works the same using a square setup, 5 with a pentagonal setup, 6 with a hexagon, etc.

Each player plays 6 mission cards to build a triangular "spaceline" that looks something like this:



Each player plays along his side of his own spaceline. Movement around to the other sides of the spaceline can be done in two ways: 1) Move from the "outside track" on your side to the "inside tracks" of the opponent's lines, *or* 2) The player who first suggested this variation says, "to get into someone else's line, you have to play a **Where No One Has Gone Before** on the appropriate intersection. Or you can use wormholes (which we make "stable wormholes" until Decipher makes an actual one) to get to someone else's space line. After the wormholes are used, they stay where they are, allowing free use of them from there on. . . . with a house rule that along with the 60 card deck, each player must have 1 **Where No One...**, and 2 Wormholes for each player playing beyond the first, i.e. 2 **Where No Ones** and 4 **Wormholes** for a 3 player game, etc.

"The games are a big success. I think that **Multiplayer Star Trek** is much more fun than regular two player and that the folks at *Decipher* should really consider making it official."

VARIATION #2: Using a Normal Spaceline

3 Players

It is possible to play using a normal spaceline. Several people have suggested variations on this theme, marking the cards in various ways, or using some restrictions to allow players to keep track of whose cards are where and who owns them.

Possibilities are as follows:

1) Play with each player handling a different affiliation (pre-selected). This helps the players keep track of card ownership by color alone in most cases. Non-aligned personnel are usually mixed with your affiliation and thus also tracked. Some memory work is required, however, especially if more than one person uses the same non-aligned ship; but it seems that experienced players can keep track.

2) An 18-card spaceline is built using 6 mission cards per player. (Can be any multiple of three really). Make a list of your own missions and dilemmas before start, to retrieve them later.

3) Two players sit on one side of the spaceline (side-by-side).

4) If one player's ship attacks another at a location, and the third player happens to have ships at the same location,

the third player has the option of joining in the battle against either side.

5) Since players are restricted to one affiliation, Treaty cards are used differently. One suggestion made: "A treaty card prevents two players from attacking each other, but a second *similar* treaty card played by another player cancels the treaty (i.e.: both cards are discarded)." The treaty can also be destroyed in other ways, of course.

VARIATION #3: "Two-Dimensional Spaceline" (Token System)

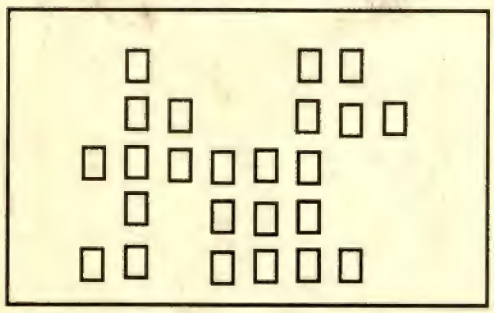
3+ Players

From: (This was our original multiplayer system designed with Darwin Bromley, which was not published in the rulebook)

It is possible to play with more than two players by doing the spaceline in two-dimensional form rather than as a "line". Actually, there are several ways to do this. The one we recommended was:

1) Each player starts the game with a small supply of "tokens" (poker chips, etc.) of his own color. Mark a number on each token; making two tokens with "1", two "2", two "3", etc., as many as the number of ships you have in your deck.

2) During the "seed" phase of the game, instead of laying out the cards in a line, you place them adjacent to each other on any side (vertically as well as horizontally), growing a jumbled two-dimensional space/time continuum that looks something like this:



This is just an example; the formation of mission cards that results could take almost any shape, somewhat like domino tiles in play.

3) Dilemma, Artifact, and Outposts are seeded underneath the Missions as in the 2-player game.

4) Ship Movement — There is a pair of tokens for each players' ships to indicate the location of each ship on the space/time continuum. The ship cards (and the personnel and equipment cards aboard them), are played in front of the player, and placed beside one of the tokens. The "mate" to that token with the same number is what you move around the space/time continuum to show where that ship is. Thus, all you have to move around is the token for the ship, placing it directly on top of the mission card where it is located.

Moving a ship is similar to the basic game, using the Range number of the ship and the Span number of the Mission card it wants to traverse. The difference here is that the ship can travel up or down as well as left or right (not diagonally), as far as the range of the ship will allow. The ship can also "turn" as it travels — moving one card left then two cards "up", for instance.

5) The rest of the game is played the same, interpreting where common sense says necessary for the different-shaped spaceline. (For example, **Where No One Has Gone Before** is used to go from one "corner" card to the opposite corner.)

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Revenge of Ice Age Preview Cards!

To assist you Magic: the Gathering players, here is the list that ought to have been in issue #18. In it you will find the names and issue numbers of all the magazines which will be carrying the special Ice Age™ preview cards. So, without further ado:

Publication	Issue	On Sale
Pyramid	#13	May
Non-Sport Update	Vol. 6, #2	March
Comic Buyer's Guide	#1116	March
SHADIS	**#18/18.5**	**Mar/Apr**
Cards Illustrated	#18	April
Scrye	May	Mar/Apr
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Creating Your Favorite RPG

Bringing Movies and Television to the Table

By Louis J. Prosperi © 1995
Illustrated by Lorelle Ahlstrom and Matt Wilson © 1995

Have you ever finished watching a television show or movie, or finished reading a novel or comic book and said "Boy, this would make a *great* roleplaying game!"

My guess is that most of us who play roleplaying games have done this at least once, and some of us (myself included) have done this a number of times. So how do you go about taking a favorite TV series, or movie, or book, or comic and turn it into a roleplaying game? That's a good question, and this article is about the answer. The purpose of this article is to offer guidelines for using a source like these as the basis for a roleplaying game.

Before I go much further, I should point out that there are a number of games available based on sources such as television, movies, etc. These are licensed games, produced by companies with the permission of the owner of the source. A good example of this type of game is the **Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game** produced by *West End Games*. *West End Games* has obtained the permission from *Lucasfilm Ltd.*, the owners of the Star Wars license, to produce a game based on **Star Wars**. The reason I point this out is that this article is intended to explain how you can create a roleplaying game based on a source FOR YOUR OWN PRIVATE USE ONLY. Don't use the method described here to create a game based on **Star Trek: The Next Generation** and try to publish and sell it without permission from the owners of **Star Trek** (namely Paramount Pictures). You will only get sued. And don't blame me; I warned you.

Overview

The process outlined in this article has three basic steps: Defining the Source, Determining the Style of Play, and Designing the Game. Each of these is described in detail below. This process may seem somewhat excessive at first glance, but the intent is to recreate the source as faithfully as possible, in order to capture its essence. After all, the source is the reason you're going through this in the first place. You might as well try to simulate it as best as possible.

Also, the process outlined in this article is similar to the process game designers go through when creating a new roleplaying game. Though this article deals with analyzing a given source, be it a television series or movie, the following steps also apply to developing new games, and it is my hope that you can use this process for this purpose as well.

Note: Though the ideas in this article are applicable to movies and books as well as television shows, I'm going to use the term 'series' in this article when referring to the source you basing the game on.

Defining the Source

Defining the source means breaking down the source that you are attempting to base a game on into pieces, which can be defined in a way that you can simulate using a game system. This first part of this process doesn't concern itself with the rules of games, but instead with describing the various aspects of the source in general terms that can then be translated into game terms. Articles in previous issues of **SHADIS** which describe **The Adventures of Brisco County Jr.** and **The X Files** are examples of defining those sources in this way. Both of these articles are light on game terms or mechanics, instead defining the important elements of those sources in general terms. That's what this first part of this process is all about.

Defining the source is done by examining and defining the premise upon which the series is based, the elements of fiction (setting, characters, and plot) in the series, and how stories are told in the series.

The Premise

The first step is to define the premise of the series. The premise is a simple statement that describes the source concisely, but completely. This is an important step in the process, for at each subsequent step, you should refer to the premise to make sure you stay on track.

Put simply, the premise of a television series is a description of what the series is about. It often describes the setting, characters, and typical plots that can be expected in episodes of the series. For our purposes, the premise serves as the basis upon which our definition of the source will rest. The premise also defines the series in terms of it as a work of fiction. It broadly defines the key elements of fiction important to all types of fiction.

When defining the premise of the series, don't spend too much time writing an exhaustive description of every facet of the series. That level of detail comes later. The idea of the premise is to summarize briefly what the series is about, not to describe each character or plot covered in the series' episodes.

The premise serves as a starting description of the series. It states what the series is about, who the characters are (in general terms), what they do, and where the series takes place.

The premise of a series or movie might also be compared to that of a roleplaying game. Stating the premise of a series is essentially the same as doing so for a roleplaying game; that is, describing what the game is about.

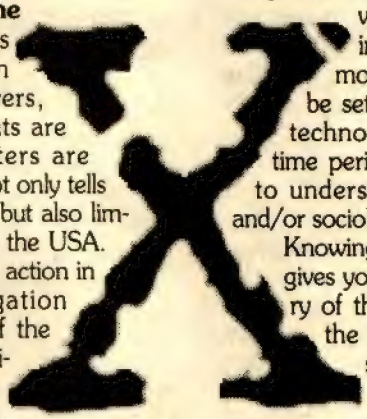
The premise of a television series might also be compared to what is sometimes referred to as the spirit of a roleplaying game. The spirit of an roleplaying game is simply what the game is about. This goes beyond simply a description of the game world or characters, but also encompasses the game's systems and mechanics, and how the rules' support the types of stories intended to be told with the game.

Example: The X Files

Throughout this article, I'm going to include examples of each part of the process by describing the series **The X Files**.

The X Files follows the exploits of a pair of modern-day FBI agents who investigate unexplained phenomena. During the course of the series, Agents Mulder and Scully confront paranormal events, mutations, reports of UFOs, genetic experiments, and a vast government cover-up working to conceal much of what they've seen.

This example premise provides us with many key ideas regarding **The X Files**. First, the setting is the modern world, but one in which UFOs, psychic powers, and other paranormal events are real. Second, the characters are defined as FBI agents. This not only tells us who the protagonists are, but also limits the setting of the series to the USA. Third, we know that the basic action in each episode is investigation towards an understanding of the truth behind the events investigated. Thus this simple premise describes the basics of the series, and also gives us much insight to **The X Files** as a work of fiction.



The Elements of Fiction

The next step is to define the source in terms that can be later translated into a game system. There are three basic elements common to all styles of fiction: Setting, Characters, and Actions. By clearly defining each of these, you will have a better understanding of your source, and how the stories told in the source are structured.

One of the best ways I've found to work out the specifics of the elements of fiction is simply to pose questions about those elements, and then answer those questions based on the work being examined. In each of the following sections, a number of questions will be presented that will help you define the specific aspects of each of the elements of fiction.

Setting

Setting is perhaps the easiest of the elements of fiction to describe, yet it is also the most encompassing. Simply put, it is the place and time in which the series takes place. The setting encompasses the world in which the events portrayed in the series occur. But the setting, while sometimes easy to describe, also comprises many different aspects. These aspects include the time period, technology level, social and political situations, and more.

Answers to some of the following questions will provide specific information about the setting of the series you are defining.

What time period is the series set in?

The time period of the series is an important element of setting. A series that takes place in the Old West (like **The Adventures of Brisco County Jr.**) is going to be very different from one that takes place in modern day.

The time period of a series also determines many other aspects of the series, some of which are discussed below. For instance, as might be expected, most science fiction series tend to be set sometime in the future, when technology has advanced. A series' time period is also important in regards to understanding the current political and/or sociological climate of the series.

Knowing the time period of a series also gives you an understanding of the history of the setting, or in simpler terms, the events which have caused the setting to be in the state it is. Of course, a series set in the modern-day, real world would have a history identical to our own, and most likely a similar political situation. As you would expect, most series have some aspect of their setting that differs from ours. For instance, a series like **The X Files** shares most of our history, but it also assumes a number of

events in the past involving UFOs and other paranormal incidents. While these incidents are not publicly known, they still form a very significant part of the setting of **The X Files**.

In the case of series set in futuristic times, the 'future history' of the series is an important aspect of the series' setting, one which offers much insight into the current state of affairs of the series. For instance, in the series **seaQuest DSV**, the exploration and colonization of the earth's oceans led to the formation of a number of confederations, each competing for ocean territory. After a nuclear exchange was only narrowly avoided, several of these confederations formed the United Earth/Oceans Organization (U.E.O.), whose role it is to maintain peace among the confederations. The seaQuest DSV is the flagship of the U.E.O. fleet and is tasked with resolving disputes that arise between the numerous confederations.

Where is the series set?

This question focuses on where the series takes place. Does it take place on earth, on some other planet or star system, or in one specific country or city?

Like the time period, identifying the physical setting of a series is important in understanding the series. A series set on one specific planet is going to be different in many ways from one set in the galaxy as a whole. Likewise, a series set in one city or country differs from one which spans the globe.

This aspect of the setting determines a number of elements about the series. It determines the types of situations that are likely to arise during the course of the series, as well as who or what might be encountered.

For example, the series **Earth 2** takes place a on single planet, many, many light years from earth. The team of colonists in that series must face the challenges of a new world, armed only with what they brought with them. They have no additional supplies, nor can they seek advice or get aid from anyone.

What is the technology level of the series' setting?

The technology level of a series most often determines the types of equipment and gadgets used by characters in the series. Is the technology level of the series the same as our own? Less advanced, as in **The Adventures of Brisco County Jr.**, or more advanced, as in **Star Trek: Voyager** or **Babylon 5**? The specifics of a series' technology is important, and is closely related to its characters (see below). Related to the question of technology is how big a role technology plays in the series. How common are different types of technology in the series?

Technology can usually be broken down into four basic categories: Weaponry, Communications, Transportation, and Entertainment/Convenience. Each of these is fairly self–explanatory, but a closer look at each might also be helpful.

Weaponry involves the technological level of the weapons and armor used in the series. Are most weapons simple firearms, as we have today, or are lasers or blasters common? What other types of unusual weapons are used in the series, such as sonic stun guns seen on **seaQuest DSV**, or the light sabers seen in **Star Wars**?

Communications involves not only telephone or video–phone, but also information exchange systems and computer networks such as the Internet. What forms of communication are used in the series? Are there telephones, cellular phones, video–phones, or personal communicators? Is there a global (or galaxy–wide) information network? How fast can information be retrieved and or sent? As an example, the Gear carried by the members of the Eden Advance team on **Earth 2** allows them to communicate both visually and aurally, as well as offering a form of virtual reality. This equipment allows members of the team to scout ahead, while remaining in contact with the rest of the group.

Transportation covers the technological devices which help people get from one place to another, such as automobiles, airplanes, etc. What advances have been made in transportation in the series? Are there hovercraft, for example? The various **Star Trek** series all make use of transporter technology, in which a person's body is converted to energy, sent to another location, then reformed. This is an excellent example of a significant technological advance in the realm of transportation. What other unique forms of transportation are found in the series, if any? In **seaQuest DSV**, underwater transportation is very common and prevalent. As this show is so heavily involved with underwater activity, this makes good sense.

Entertainment is the area where much of our world's technological advances are most evident. Advances such as virtual reality, electronic game platforms (such as Super NES or Sega), and home theater are good examples of entertainment technology. What types of entertainment technology are found in the series? Does virtual reality exist? How about holographic simulations, such as those found on the Holodecks on **Star Trek: The Next Generation**? Lastly, items of convenience are those used in everyday life, by most everyone. Items such as microwave ovens and personal digital assistants (such as Apple's Newton and Sharp's Message Pad) fall into this category. While this type of technology is generally not as important in stories as the previous types, it is still worthwhile to look at the way technology is used for entertainment and convenience in the series.

Are there any unusual or unique political or social situations?

Another aspect of a series' setting is its political and sociological situations. Is the series set in a (relatively) stable political environment, or is it unstable, with the threat of war looming on the horizon? Are there established political enemies in the series? The basis of many older television series was political differences and the presence of a very obvious enemy.

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine and **Babylon 5** both involve an unstable political environment, which provides much of the conflict in both those series. In the case of **Star Trek: Deep Space Nine**, the tension between the Cardassian Empire and the planet Bajor, along with the involvement of the United Federation of Planets and Star Fleet, form the premise of the show. Likewise, on **Babylon 5**, the uneasy state of peace between the Minbari, Centauri, Narn, Terrans, and the Vorlons provide an ideal situation for dramatic conflict.

Another topic is that of sociology. What is the sociological climate of the setting? Is it much like our own current situation, or have things either improved or worsened? In the universe of the various **Star Trek** shows, for instance, the sociological situation is much improved over our own. The Federation has all but eliminated poverty, hunger, and many other problems faced by the people of our world. In contrast, **Earth 2** supposes a setting in which the earth has become nearly uninhabitable, where most of the population has relocated to immense space stations orbiting earth. Ruled by the omnipresent and distrustful Council, society has become highly stratified, with an almost caste system separating the laborers from the politicians from the well–to–dos. Add to this the syndrome that has begun to afflict the children of the stations' inhabitants, and the social picture of the setting of **Earth 2** is seen to be clearly bleak as best.

Does the setting account for any unusual or special abilities on the part of people (magic, psychic powers, etc.)?

The last aspect of setting to consider is that of special or paranormal powers and/or

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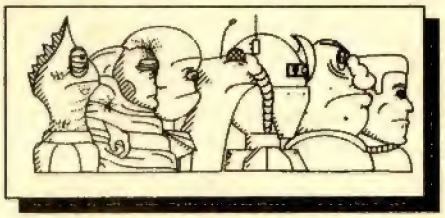

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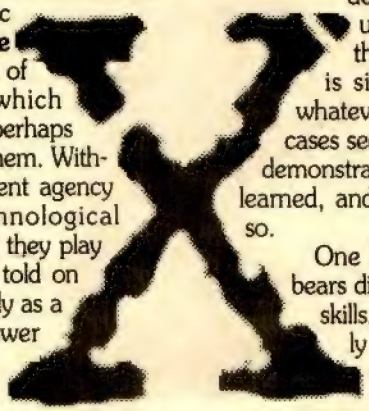
abilities. The settings of many science fiction and fantasy series include various types of special abilities; often magic or psychic powers such as telekinesis or ESP. This aspect, while certainly a part of a series' setting, is also important when discussing Characters and Actions, each of which is discussed below. For now, though, our concern is to establish if such abilities are present in the series' setting, and if so, how these abilities are used. Also important to consider is the rarity of these powers. Are they common or rare? Are they natural abilities, or are they a product of some bizarre sort of medical procedure or experiment?

As examples, in the fictional universe of **SeaQuest DSV**, there are known psychics and telepaths, one of which is a member of the SeaQuest crew. Similarly, within the universe of the **Star Trek** series, many races are known to have telepathic powers, such as the Vulcans and Betazeds. In the case of **SeaQuest DSV**, these are natural abilities, and are portrayed as being very rare and difficult to use, as well as being of somewhat limited power. Multiple episodes of **The X Files** have suggested both magical and psychic powers, though the truth behind them remains a mystery.

Example: The X Files

The setting of **The X Files** is the modern world, one of extreme possibilities. The series takes place circa 1995 (current), and assumes a technology level equal to our own experience, and the political and social situations of our world.

But the setting of **The X Files** also assumes the existence of extraterrestrial life, paranormal powers, genetic mutations, and more. Also, **The X Files** assumes the existence of a government conspiracy which knows of these things, and is perhaps even responsible for many of them. Within the extent of this government agency or conspiracy, many technological advances have been made, but they play little to no part in the stories told on **The X Files**. They serve largely as a way of demonstrating the power and extent of the agency.



Characters

After defining and describing the setting of your series, the next element of fiction to consider is its characters. There are three main types of characters to consider, central characters, opposing characters and supporting characters. While all of these types of characters are important to the series, the focus in this article is towards central characters, as these are, in essence, the player characters of the series. Before we can discuss the concerns unique to each type of character, we should first consider those ideas that are common to all characters.

The key ideas to consider when defining characters are identity (who the characters are), actions (what the characters do), and motivation (why the characters do what they do). A character's identity is similar to the premise of the series; a short, simple statement describing the character in enough detail that the character can be distinguished from others. For instance, the character of Special Agent Fox Mulder from **The X Files** can be described as *"a brilliant investigator working for the FBI, with a passion for the unknown who chooses to investigate unusual cases that are in some way inexplicable."*

Character actions are the different tasks the characters perform during a story. These are most often a function of the character's profession or the role they fill in the setting of the series. For instance, on **Star Trek: Deep Space Nine**, Miles O'Brien is the Chief of Operations for the station. In this role, it is his job to keep the station in top working order. His position tells us what types of actions he most often takes. Since the actions of the characters in a story form the basis of the story, this aspect of character is very closely related to the idea of Plot, and is discussed in more detail below.

A character's motivation is simply why he does what he does, as it pertains to the character's role in the series. For instance, using the previous example, why does Agent Mulder investigate cases involving unusual circumstances and/or the paranormal? His motivation is simply to discover the truth, whatever that truth may be. As the cases seen in episodes of **The X Files** demonstrate, there is much truth to be learned, and Mulder is determined to do so.

One last aspect of characters that bears discussion is that of abilities and skills. This facet of character, closely related to character actions, reveals what types of activities the characters are proficient at performing and capable of attempting. Not all characters share the same abilities, nor should they. Most characters have skills or abilities that are unique to that character. This is one of the ways writers and creators make characters unique and individual. At the same

time however, characters who have similar or identical professions may share some skills.

For example, in **The X Files**, Fox Mulder is a psychologist and a specialist at creating profiles of suspects based on the evidence of past crimes. Dana Scully is a doctor, and a specialist at forensics. Either character might be able to work up a profile of a serial killer, but of the two, only Scully is capable of performing an autopsy. Mulder wouldn't even attempt to do so, for it is beyond his area of expertise.

When defining characters' abilities, think about general areas of ability and expertise rather than narrow-focused, individual skills. To continue with the example above, Mulder might have the skills of Criminal Investigation, Psychology and Paranormal Lore, while Scully might have Criminal Investigation, Medicine, and Forensics. The similarities in their abilities allows them to work together on certain aspects of a case, while their specific and unique skills allow each to use those abilities as needed to help solve cases.

Central Characters

The central characters, or protagonists, of a series are the stars of the show. All kidding aside, this is the simplest way of determining which characters are important in the series. This first step, deciding which characters are the central characters, is the easy part. Once you've identified them, the next step is to define the characters according to the key ideas above, namely identity, actions, and motivation. The characters' abilities or skills are a part of both identity and actions, and when you define those aspects you should also define their abilities.

When defining the central characters, you should do so in two ways. First in a general way, in which you define them by the types of characters they are, as well as typical motivations and actions. The second way is to define them as individuals, each with a specific identity and motivation.

The distinction between defining the characters in general and specific terms will become useful when determining the style of game you want to play (see **Determining the Style of Play** below). If you choose a style of game in which the players each play one of the central characters from the series, you're going to want to define those specific characters very well, so the players are better equipped to roleplay the characters appropriately. If, on the other hand, you choose a style in which the characters are similar to the central characters, you need to understand them in a less specific way, with an eye towards describing what types of characters they are, and what motivates them in a general sense. This will aid the players in creating characters that mesh with the fictional setting of the series.

Below are a number of questions that will help you define the central characters of your series in both general and specific terms. These questions address the same areas as discussed above, namely identity, actions, and motivation, and offer examples from a number of television shows movies.

Who are the central characters?

The central characters of **Star Trek: The Next Generation** are members of the crew of the Starship Enterprise. They include Captain Jean-Luc Picard, Commander William Riker, Doctor Beverly Crusher, Chief Engineer Geordi LaForge, Counselor Deanna Troi, Chief of Security Worf, and Science Officer Lt. Commander Data.

Do they work for a specific organization or government or government agency?

The central characters in the movie **Sneakers** work together as a private security consulting firm. On **seaQuest DSV**, the central characters all serve on board the seaQuest, the flagship of the U.E.O. navy.

What motivates the characters?

The central characters of **The X Files**, agents Fox Mulder and Dana Scully, work for the Federal Bureau of Investigation. They are motivated by desires for both justice and the truth.

What specific skills or abilities do the characters have?

The characters in **Sneakers** are all experts of sorts in different aspects of security, including both physical and electronic security. The crew of the Enterprise on **Star Trek: The Next Generation** are all Star Fleet officers, trained in many various skills and duties related to exploration of space.

Opposing Characters

Opposing characters are the villains of the series, or to use less adversarial terms, antagonists. This does not always mean that they are evil or bad, simply that they represent forces somehow opposed to the central characters. Very often, the plot of a story begins with some sort of action on the part of the antagonist(s). For example, the escape of Dr. Emilio Lizardo (Lord John Worfin) in **The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai Across the Eighth Dimension** and the subsequent kidnapping of Dr. Hikita is the basis of the plot of that movie. The various crimes and incidents investigated in episodes of **The X Files** are usually at the hand of some sort of opposing character.

Unless you plan to run adventures based directly on episodes of your series, you will probably only need to define the opposing characters in general terms, rather than specific ones. Of course, in the case of recurring villains, you may need to define them more precisely. The questions above can also be used to define the series' opposing and supporting characters (see below).

Supporting Characters

Supporting characters are characters who are friendly to the central characters, whose actions help move the plot along without becoming the focus of the episode. A good example of supporting characters are Perry White and Jimmy Olsen in **Lois and Clark: The New Adventures of Superman**. These two characters help Lois and Clark (and Superman of course), but they rarely take the spotlight. Another example of a supporting character is Garak, the Cardassian tailor on **Star Trek: Deep Space Nine**. Garak was once a spy in the employ of the Cardassian Obsidian Order, and his knowledge and expertise have aided the crew of the station on more than one occasion.

Supporting characters need not be described in great detail, and very often, there is not enough detail with which to do so in the first place. When defining these characters, their role in the stories is the most important aspect to define, but accurately defining their actions, abilities, and motivations also helps bring the feel and atmosphere of the series to life.

Example: The X Files

The central characters of **The X Files** are Fox Mulder and Dana Scully, a pair of special field agents working for the FBI, assigned to investigating cases with unusual or unexplained aspects. While each is motivated to seek justice and uphold the law, they also are determined to find the truth behind the events of the cases they investigate.

Supporting characters on **The X Files** include Deep Throat and Mr. X (names given by the series' producers), and Assistant Director Walter Skinner. The former two characters aid Mulder and Scully by providing them with classified information that relates to the cases they are assigned to. These men do this because they feel a need to help expose the government cover-ups concealing captured alien technology and radical experiments performed by government agencies. Assistant Director Skinner aids Mulder and Scully by allowing their investigations to continue despite threats and warnings from officials in higher positions in the government.

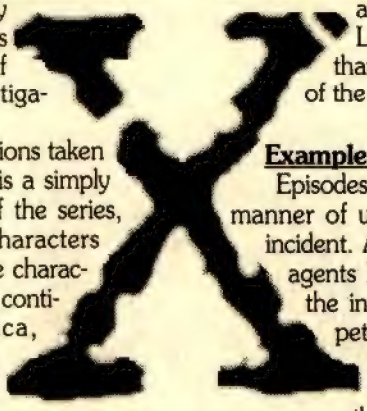
Opposing characters are the most uncommon in **The X Files**. In most episodes, there is no clear cut villain, and when there is, it is usually only for one or two episodes. There is one recurring characters on **The X Files** who would be considered an opposing character: the man referred to in the show's credits as the Smoking Man. This man holds a position of power in the government, one that is definitely involved in the cover-ups and conspiracies encountered by agents Mulder and Scully. On more than one occasion this man has actively opposed the agents, though in most instances he is content to simply observe their activities, in order to ensure the agents do not get too close to the truth.

Actions and Plot

The last element of fiction that needs to be discussed is that of actions and plot. The plot of a story is simply, the sequence of incidents or events which make up that story. These events and incidents are nearly all the result of actions taken by characters, whether they be the protagonists (central characters) or antagonists (opposing characters). In some cases, plot events are the result of actions the of supporting characters, but this is a rare occurrence.

The first part of this element, actions, refers to what the characters do within the context of the story. The results of these actions are the events and incidents which make up the story's plot. This aspect of fiction is, naturally, very closely related to that of character, since without characters, most actions can not occur.

This aspect of your series is most always best defined in fairly general terms, that is the types of actions performed, rather than specific ones. For instance, instead of noting that Scully performed an autopsy on the body of Ray Soames in an episode of **The X Files**, it would be more useful to simply note that Scully often performs autopsies during the course of her and agent Mulder's investigations.



Determining the types of actions taken by the characters in the series is a simply matter of watching episodes of the series, and noting the actions the characters take. In the series **Earth 2**, the characters travel the land towards the continent known as New Pacifica, where the colony they have been sent to establish will based. Along the way, the characters search for food and water, deal with the environment of an alien world, and confront the other inhabitants of the world, both the native inhabitants and those placed there by the Council.

Once you have considered the idea of actions, you can next consider the resulting combinations of those actions, or plot. As noted before, plot is the sequence of events and incidents which make up a story. But plots are more than merely the combinations of events and incidents; they also help define the series by describing those events and incidents most likely to occur. When defining actions and plot, you should also work to define the types of events, incidents, and resulting plots that are likely to be seen in the series you are defining. A good way to do this is to simply take notes on the plots of the episodes that you feel really capture the essence of the series. For instance, many fans of **The X Files** feel the episodes *'Squeeze'* and *'The Erlenmeyer Flask'* are among the best examples of what the show is about. Likewise, many fans of **Star Trek: The Next Generation** feel that the episodes *'Yesterday's Enterprise'* and *'The Best of Both Worlds'* (Parts 1 & 2) are among the best of that series. Using these types of episodes as a guide will help you identify the types of plots that fit with the series as you envision it. Also, these notes can serve as a guide when you are creating your own plots, as described later in this article.

Does this mean that there are only a set number of plots and stories possible based on a single series? Absolutely not! In fact, a change of pace is sometimes a welcome change. Likewise, some of the best episodes of many television series are the ones which offer a slightly different type of story. In these cases, the story is most often centered around the characters themselves, rather than on what they do. A good example of this type of story is the episode *'Family'* from **Star Trek: The Next Generation**, in which the personal lives of Captain Picard and Lt. Worf are the focus, rather than the actions they and the rest of the crew take.

Example: The X Files

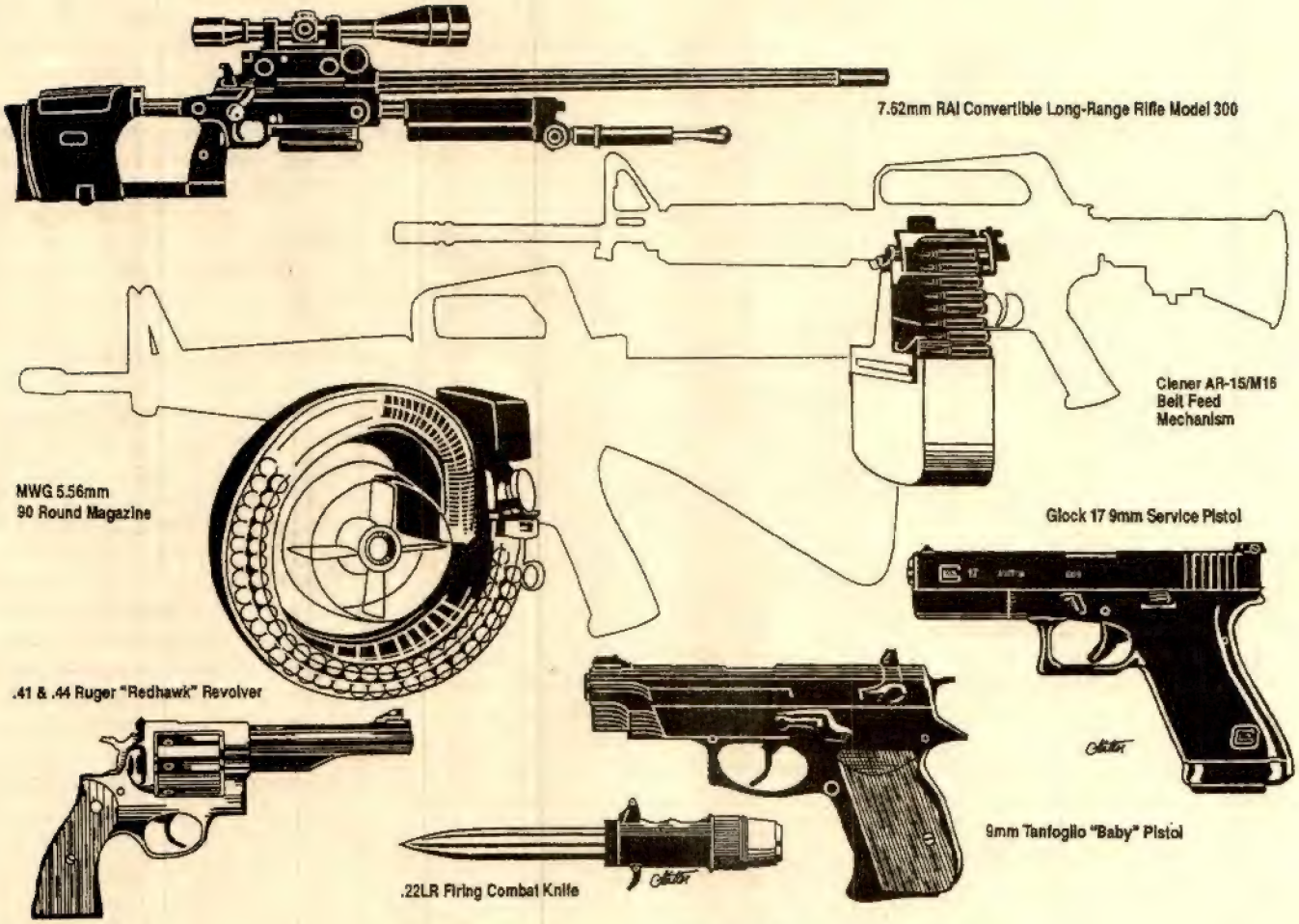
Episodes of **The X Files** involve some manner of unexplained phenomenon or incident. After a report of the incident, agents Mulder and Scully investigate the incident, searching for the perpetrator if appropriate, and the truth if possible. During the course of the investigation, the agents gather evidence that leads them to a solution of the case. In many instances, the solution is either not complete or cannot be substantiated, and the case investigated remains unsolved.

Techniques and Trappings

At this point, we have discussed the series' Premise, its Setting, Characters, and Actions/Plot. But do these ideas describe the series completely and definitively? Not at all. There is much more to a work of fiction (be it a television series, movie, or a book) beyond these elements. There is another aspect of the series that needs to be described if you are to have a thorough understanding of the series. This aspect is difficult to describe, as it encompasses many ideas and elements. This is what I call Techniques and Trappings.

Techniques and Trappings is a catch-all category for the other elements of fiction that are important to the structure of stories in the series, as well as other specific aspects of the series that are important yet which cannot be categorized in any of the previous areas discussed. But Techniques and Trappings are not simply a separate aspect of the series to be defined. They also represent a further defining of the series' Premise, and its Setting, Characters, and Action/Plot.

Though this grouping of varying aspects may imply that Techniques and Trappings are secondary in importance, they are far from it. Techniques and Trappings are not lumped together because they aren't important. Instead, they represent elements which are too diverse to consider separately, and too important to gloss over or ignore. Also, not all



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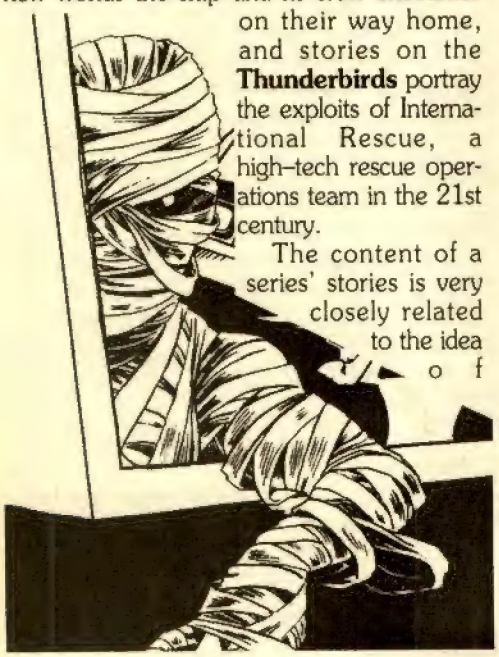
the elements of Techniques and Trappings are consistently found in all types of fiction, as are Setting, Characters, and Action/Plot. Some of these are very common, while others are less frequently encountered.

Lastly, the elements that comprise Techniques and Trappings extend beyond the scope of most roleplaying system rules, and are instead methods, procedures, and tricks that can be employed to better capture the feel of the source. The previously discussed Elements of Fiction can all be defined by most roleplaying game systems. Most of what I include in Techniques and Trappings cannot.

The elements which make up the Techniques and Trappings of a series describe what the stories are about, how those stories are told, and specific aspects of the series' Setting, Characters, and Actions/Plots that make it unique. Specifically, techniques refers to various types of storytelling techniques and devices used in the series, such as mood, tone, flashbacks, parallel stories, etc. Trappings refers to how the stories are told, and other aspects such as theme, which help decorate the story, and give it more significance.

What the Stories are About

The first key aspect of Techniques and Trappings is a description of what the series' stories are about. There are two basic areas that pertain to this: the story's content, and its theme. Content refers to the specific types of events and circumstances that are likely to be at the center of the series' stories. For instance, stories on **The X Files** all deal with unexplained or paranormal phenomena, stories on **Star Trek: Voyager** are about the new worlds the ship and its crew encounter on their way home, and stories on the **Thunderbirds** portray the exploits of International Rescue, a high-tech rescue operations team in the 21st century.



The content of a series' stories is very closely related to the idea of Actions described above, but where our discussion of Actions was concerned with the specific actions taken by the characters, content in more concerned with the types of things that are likely to occur during the series. The distinction here is a fine one, but an important one. It is not enough to simply state the likely or most common Actions seen on the series. You should also describe the types of events common on the series as well. For example, when discussing the idea of Actions and Plot of **The X Files**, I said that agents Mulder and Scully investigate unusual or paranormal phenomena. When discussing the content of **The X Files** however, I would also describe the different types of paranormal phenomena, such as UFOs, alien abductions, psychic abilities, etc.

The other half of our description of what a series' stories are about is theme. A story's theme is in essence, what that story is about, or the story's message or moral. Not all series make use of theme, though most do, even if it is understated and de-emphasized. Many series, such as **Star Trek: The Next Generation**, have explored many different themes over the course of many episodes. In the case of some series, the individual episodes don't have themes, but the series as a whole does. In this case, it is common that many of the individual episodes serve to reinforce the series' theme (or themes) rather than offer one of their own. An excellent example of this idea is **The X Files**, where each episode serves to reinforce the central idea of the series, *The Truth is Out There*. Each episode of **The X Files** involves Mulder and Scully search for the truth, and in each episode, the audience gets a new glimpse at that same truth.

How the Stories are Told

Once we understand what the stories told in the series are about, the next thing to consider is how those stories are told. This aspect of the series involves two main ideas; the basic structure of the series' stories, and the types of fictional techniques and devices used on the series.

Story structure refers to the way in which the events (or scenes) of the story are presented to the audience. Does each episode of the series follow a similar sequence of events, or is each different from previous episodes? Most series follow a structure of some sort, and if you watch enough episodes of a given series, you'll begin to recognize the way stories progress on the series. Story structure is closely related to the different types of stories commonly seen on the series, and on their content. Different types of stories require different structures. For instance, the mission type of stories as seen on **Star Trek: The Next Generation** are usually structured differently from the survival and exploration-based stories seen on **Earth 2**.

For instance, the stories on **Star Trek: The Next Generation** are often based on a mission of some sort, whether it be to chart a remote star system or to investigate some sort of anomaly. These stories are about the efforts of the crew in their attempts to accomplish the mission, and the dilemmas and challenges that arise during their attempts. The stories on **Earth 2** are based on the efforts of the Eden Advance team to reach New Pacifica and establish a new colony. These stories are most often about the difficulties the characters face as they traverse the planet and encounter its inhabitants.

What types of stories are most often seen in the series? Are they investigations such as on **The X Files**, or are they missions as on **Star Trek: The Next Generation**, or do they involve different events and circumstances in the lives of the central characters as on **Start Trek: Deep Space Nine**? Knowing the types of stories that are common in a series can help when creating your own adventures, as you will have a model from which to design adventures that will fit the nature of the series.

Now that you have the basic structure of the stories on your series, the next thing to consider is the specific types of fictional or storytelling techniques used on the series. These are, simply put, storytelling devices and techniques used by the series writers (and also by you as the gamemaster) in the stories told in the series' episodes. There are many, many different storytelling devices used in fiction, such as dream sequences, flashbacks and parallel stories. In general, storytelling techniques are not used very often on television series or movies, though they are in most novels. In fact, the relatively sparse use of these types of techniques make them all the more effective when they are used.

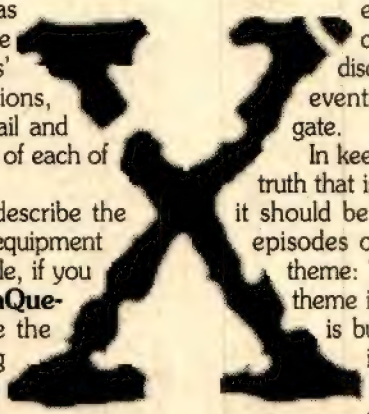
Some series use techniques that are unique to them, or at least, the approach to their use is unique. A good example of this type of technique is that of the Captain's Log or Ship's Log on **Star Trek: The Next Generation** and **Star Trek: Voyager** (Station Log on **Star Trek: Deep Space Nine**). The presentation of these logs is a form of narrative that tells the viewers the basic background of the story, as well as offering them bits of off screen action that are indirectly important to the plot of the story. The Captain's Log is also often used as a form of denouement, in

which the Captain or Commander reports on the resolution of the story.

Similar techniques are the specific storytelling conventions used in a series' stories. The specific ways in which a series' stories are told help define the series as much as descriptions of its setting and characters. For instance, on **The X Files**, Agents Mulder and Scully and the audience never learn the real truth behind the events in each episode of the series. This facet of **The X Files** is one of its most important, yet it cannot be categorized as any standard sort of fictional element. This is something that is key to the nature of the show.

Specific and Unique Elements of the Series

The last part of Techniques and Trappings we need to define are the specific and unique aspects of the series' Setting, Characters, or Actions and have not yet been defined. This includes specific types of equipment, as well as specific organizations, opposing characters or political situations. Whereas earlier in the process you were making notes about the series' Setting, Characters, and Actions, now is the time for more detail and information about the specifics of each of those elements.



At this point you should describe the unique vehicles and pieces of equipment used on the series. For example, if you were basing your game on **seaQuest DSV**, you would describe the seaQuest DSV itself, along with the specific other vehicles and weapons used by characters on the series. If your game was to be based on any of the **Star Trek** series, you would describe the transporters, food replicators, phasers, and other items commonly seen there. The key things to consider are specific types of technology that are central to the show's premise, such as the seaQuest DSV on **seaQuest DSV**, or the Thunderbirds and all of International Rescue's equipment on the **Thunderbirds**.

Like specific types of equipment, you should describe any specific organizations and opposing characters that are important to the series. Organizations might include specific governments or agencies, such as the Cardassian Empire from **Star Trek: Deep Space Nine**, or the U.E.O. on **seaQuest DSV**. These types of organizations were likely covered briefly in your description of the series' Setting, but here you should work out as much detail as possible, or at least as much as you think you'll need when running a game based on the series.

Parallel to the way organizations or governments were covered under the series Setting, opposing characters should have been noted under Characters. But again, now is the time to go into detail about the more significant and important opposing characters of the series. For instance, during the first season of **Lois and Clark: The New Adventures of Superman**, the character of Lex Luthor was very prominent. If you were basing a game on that series, at this point you would want to describe Luthor in as much detail as possible.

Example: The X Files

The stories on **The X Files** all involve unexplained events or paranormal phenomena, and agents Mulder and Scully searching for the truth behind them. Whether the stories are about UFO encounters, genetic mutations, or government conspiracies, it is the truth that Mulder and Scully search for. Despite their efforts, however, in nearly all cases, Mulder and Scully never discover the real truth behind the events and situations they investigate.

In keeping with the emphasis on the truth that is so prevalent in **The X Files**, it should be no surprise that virtually all episodes of **The X Files** explore one theme: *The Truth is Out There*. This theme is the basis on which the show is built. *Trust No One* is another important theme of **The X Files**. On more than one occasion, Mulder and Scully have been manipulated or lied to, sometimes even by people they have every reason to trust.

Opposed to Mulder and Scully's efforts to uncover the truth is a vast and powerful conspiracy that stretches from the intelligence community and the military to the Justice Department. The full extent of this agency's power is unknown, but it has been able to exert its influence within the FBI, as well as the US Air Force and the executive branch of the government. This conspiracy is involved with the cover-up of captured UFO technology and unsanctioned military experimentation.

Three men who have ties to this organization have appeared on **The X Files**. First was the character of Deep Throat, a man who provided Mulder and Scully with aid and secret information which helped them in their investigations. Deep Throat was killed by agents working for the conspiracy at the end of the first season. Another character with ties to this organization is the man known only as Mr. X. This man has taken Deep Throat's place helping Mulder and Scully. The last character of note with ties to the conspiracy is known as the Smoking Man. This man is in a position of some authority in the conspiracy, as by all appearances it was he who ordered Scully be abducted and experimented upon.

Determining The Style of Play

Once you have finished defining the series' Premise, Elements of Fiction, and Techniques and Trappings, the next step is to determine the style of game you plan to run. Basically, there are two styles of adventures and/or campaigns that can be run based on a TV series, movie, or other source. The first is 'playing the series,' that is, playing the characters from the series. The second is playing characters inspired by the series. Certain series or sources are better suited for one of the other of these, while others work equally well in both styles. Let's take a closer look at each of these, and which type of series is appropriate to each style of play.

Playing the Series

This style is the more limiting of the two, and many players might shrink away from it at first. In this style, each of the players plays one of the characters from the cast of the series. This means that the players will not be playing their own characters, but instead a pre-created character. Many players prefer to play characters of their own creation, since they can more fully roleplay a character from their own imagination than they could one created by someone else.

On the other hand, some players may love the idea of playing a certain character from one of their favorite series. For instance, in a game based on **Star Trek: The Next Generation**, there are probably lots of players who would jump at the chance to play Jean-Luc Picard, or any of the main cast.

Playing this style of game requires that the characters from the series be designed, or 'statted,' in the game system being used (see **Designing the Game**, below). While this might normally be something you (as the gamemaster) would do, allowing the players to help you 'stat' the characters is a good way to get them involved. Since you are creating this game for your players as well as yourself, getting the players involved at some level is probably a good thing. Also, they may feel that by helping to 'create' the character, they may have a better feel for the character when it comes time to roleplay.

This style also requires that the players be familiar with the series and its characters. If the series you are working is a favorite of your players, this is no a problem, as the players most likely already know the characters well enough to roleplay them. If the series is something you like, but that is unfamiliar to the other players, you may have to write character backgrounds and descriptions for all the characters you intend to include as well as a basic introduction to the series. These character write-ups don't need to be exhaustive. They only need to convey the character's personality and background in enough detail so a player can roleplay the character correctly, or at least close enough for both you and the player to enjoy the game.

As an example, a few years back, I ran an event at Gen Con based on the **Thunderbirds**, Gerry Anderson's Supermarionation series from the 1960s. (Yes, I know it's a puppet show, but it had the coolest vehicles ever!) Since I couldn't know if the players that would show up would be familiar with the series (an unlikely event in any case), I wrote up character descriptions, backgrounds, and roleplaying notes that allowed many of the players (some of whom had never actually seen the series) to roleplay the characters.

Another limiting factor to this style of play is the number of players versus the number of central characters on the series. Some of the more recent shows that might make good roleplaying games have large ensemble casts, sometimes as large as eight or nine central characters. Eight or nine players would be a fairly large group for a game, and many gamemasters have difficulty handling that many players. Also, getting a group of eight or nine players together at the same time is often difficult. If there are nine central characters on the series, but only four players, which characters are left out? Also, unless you plan your adventures or campaigns on a specific subset of the central characters, you may find that one or more of the characters important to your adventure might not be chosen to be played. Combine this with the task of choosing which player gets to play which character, and you can see that such an arrangement is rife with challenges. Also, even if you do have enough players, does the story involve all the characters equally from beginning to end? Most series switch between characters, a practice that could result in some players being bored, while others are constantly involved in the story.

None of these challenges are too severe that they should prevent you from playing the game. The point is not to discourage you, but to forewarn you of some of the potential challenges associated with this style of play. The section entitled 'Playing the Game,' later in this article discusses a few more of the challenges associated with games based on outside sources, and offers some advice for dealing with them.

Inspired by the Series

In this style of play, the players' characters are similar to those in the series, but are not the series' characters themselves. This type of game allows the players to create their own characters, giving them a better understanding of the characters they are roleplaying. This style also allows the players to contribute to the game, as well as experiment with creating new characters that must fit into a pre-existing setting.

When possible, this is the preferable of the two styles, as it is more open to different types of stories and characters. For instance, instead of playing Agents Mulder and Scully, players could play their own FBI agents, whose investigations often involve unusual or unexplained phenomena. Like 'Playing the Series,' however, this style of game also has its challenges. First off, while the players are able to create their own characters, those characters must fit in with the setting of the series. This means that you will have to provide guidance during the character creation process to ensure that the characters fit the series.

This style also means you will have to decide upon a character creation system based on the game system you choose (see **Designing the Game**, below). While a character creation system is a part of virtually all published game systems, any specific aspects of the series need to be accounted for during character creation. For instance, if your series is one that offers psychic powers (such as **seaQuest DSV**, or perhaps **Babylon 5**), the character creation process should allow the characters to purchase psychic powers, unless of course you choose not to allow the players' characters to have those powers. If you do allow psychic powers, what do they cost the characters?, how are these powers treated in game mechanics?, etc. While these issues are obviously part of the design process (see below), they are also important to consider here, as they represent challenges in games in this style of play.

So Which Style is Appropriate?

Neither style of play is any better than the other, though each is more appropriate to certain types of series that the other. So what type of series is appropriate to which style? Good question! The answer depends largely on the Premise of the series, and how specific the characters and setting are. Now, you might be saying, 'Aren't all shows about specific characters in a specific setting?' Well, yes they are, but there is a difference. The key to this difference can be found in the answer to the following question: Does the Premise of the series require the presence of the central characters, or could other similar characters be used, while still maintaining the series' Premise?

Some series, while they do have central characters, involve a given type of character rather than a specific character. For instance, **The X Files** is about FBI agents who investigate the paranormal. Yes, it's true that the characters of Mulder and Scully are very central to the popularity of the series, but a game based on **The X Files** could feature any set of FBI agents, and still retain the essence, or Premise, of the series.

As an opposite example, **seaQuest DSV** is about the captain and crew of the seaQuest, and their adventures in the oceans of the 21st century. A game based on **seaQuest DSV** needs the central characters from the series in order to maintain the series' Premise.

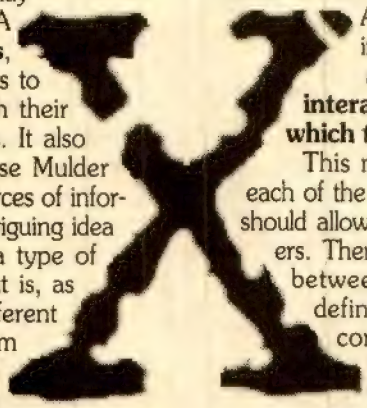
Generally speaking, 'Playing the Series' is best suited to series that feature a very specific cast of characters, in a very specific setting, such as **seaQuest DSV**, **Babylon 5**, **Earth 2** or any of the **Star Trek** series (**Star Trek: The Next Generation**, **Star Trek: Deep Space Nine**, or **Star Trek: Voyager**). Games that are 'Inspired by the Series' work well series which feature a given type of character, such as **The X Files**.

There are ways to use the 'Inspired by the Series' style of play with series that normally would considered 'Playing the Series' types of series. For instance, while the **Star Trek** shows each fit into a single large-scale setting, or universe, it is very possible to create a game in which the characters are the crew of a new ship, assigned to explore a given part of the galaxy. In fact, the **Star Trek Roleplaying Game** published by *FASA Corporation* assumed that most groups would play their own characters on their own ship. A game based on **seaQuest DSV** might take place 20 years into the future, with a whole new crew, but on the same ship. The characters in a game based on **Earth 2** might be the other members of the Eden Advance team, those characters who only appear in the background during episodes of that series. Alternatively, the characters might be colonists who arrive on the main ship, 22 months after the landing of the Eden Advance team.

As can be seen, each of these two styles of play have their advantages and drawbacks, and each works with a different type of series. The choice between these two will most likely come down to the series you are using for your game, and how closely you want to mirror that series.

Example: The X Files

The X Files is an example of a series that could work equally well in both styles of play. The better of the two, though, is a game that is Inspired by the Series, rather than Playing the Series. First, Playing the Series would mean that only two players could participate, and that they would have to play Agents Mulder and Scully. A game Inspired by **The X Files**, however, allows the characters to create their own agents, with their own personalities and beliefs. It also allows the gamemaster to use Mulder and Scully in the game as sources of information or aid. In fact, one intriguing idea might be to use Mulder as a type of 'Deep Throat' character. That is, as the characters investigate different cases, Mulder could feed them information which could help them. An ideal source of this information would be **The X Files** themselves. Mulder's office is filled with filing cabinets full of X Files, any of which he could forward to other agents to help them in their efforts.



Designing the Game

Now that you've defined the series that will serve as the basis for your game, and have decided the style of game you want to run, it's time to design the game system and mechanics you will use in the game. In truth, you may not have to 'design' the game system *per se*. Instead you could use one of the many roleplaying game systems available on the market. In any event, I'll use the term design anyway, since it is a good description of the process you'll be undertaking.

The previous steps in this process have provided you with lots of information about your series, such as who the central characters are, what the setting is like, how the series' stories are told, and what those stories are generally about. All this is important when designing a game system that will be appropriate for the series. But before we get into the specifics of designing the game system itself, we should first look at the job of a roleplaying game system in general terms. Once we understand this, we can then consider what type of game system will work for your series.

So what is the job of a roleplaying game system? Put simply, it is to define the elements of fiction with a system of some sort that allows those elements to interact in the same manner in which they do in works of fiction, and so that the outcome of character actions and events can determined. Whew! That definition is quite a mouthful, so let's look at it one piece at a time:

To define the elements of fiction with a system of some sort

This means that each of the main elements of fiction, Setting, Character, and Actions/Plot, be defined by ratings or categories of some sort.

allows those elements to interact in the same manner in which they do in works of fiction

This means that the way in which each of the elements of fiction are defined should allow each to interact with the others. There should be some consistency between the way each element is defined, as well as some form of correspondence between them. For instance, if character abilities are rated on scale of 1 to 10, and Psychic powers are rated by a scale of Average, Good, and Excellent, there must be some sort of correspondence between the 1–10 scale and the Average, Good, Excellent scale.

so that the outcome of character actions and events can determined

This simply means that there must be a way to determine the outcome of various actions and events, whether these actions taken by characters, or other types of events, such as natural phenomena.

So how does a game system perform this task? By providing a system for defining the various elements of setting, defining characters, and for resolving actions. These three are the same as the three main Elements of Fiction discussed above. As noted earlier, the things that comprise Techniques and Trappings are usually beyond the scope of most roleplaying systems.

Most published roleplaying systems perform this task do some degree or another, since if they didn't, the games would be unsuitable for play. For our purposes the question is, in what ways should the game system define the Setting, Characters, and Actions/Plot so that they are faithful to the series? Let's take a look at each of these in turn.

Space does not permit this article to go into great detail about specifics of statistics, dice rolling mechanics, and the like, and I'll make no attempt here to discuss those issues. Instead, the focus will be on the types of things you need to consider when designing or choosing the game system for your game. I plan to write an article on just this sort of thing sometime in a future issue.

Defining Settings

As discussed earlier in this article, the setting of a series encompasses many different aspects, ranging from technology to special abilities such as magical or psychic powers. The game system needs to be able to explain how these things function in the setting, especially how they interact with characters, and the possible outcomes of their use.

In regards to technology, the game system should be able to define the different types described above, especially Weaponry, Communications, and Transportation. The level of detail needed when defining each of these types depends on its importance to the series. In some instances, it is simply enough to say that a particular piece of equipment exists. In other cases, however, such as most forms of weapons, specific information is important, such as how much damage a weapon inflicts on its target, how much it costs, and how many times it can be used before it runs out of ammunition or power.

In regards to communication, the range at which certain devices function, as well as how long a device can operate before its battery dies (if applicable) are important to note. When describing vehicles, their speed, maneuverability, and other factors need to be considered, especially if vehicle use is important in the series.

For example, the weapons seen on **seaQuest DSV** are of two types; sonic stun guns and laser guns. How do these function in the game? What is the effect of each on a target? As another example, in the series the **Thunderbirds**, vehicles and vehicle operation are central to the action of the series. The series' name itself comes from the real stars of the show, the Thunderbirds, a set of five fantastic vehicles, each designed for a specialized mission. Any game based on this series would require a system for defining the characteristics of the Thunderbirds, as well as how they are used by characters.

In regards to special abilities, such as magical or psychic powers, how these function in the series needs to be defined. While these are also a facet of character definition, since they are part of the setting, they need to be consid-

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ered here. What types of abilities are possible? What is the extent of these powers? How common are these powers? What is the effective range of these powers? If these powers can harm characters, how much damage can they inflict?

For example, psychic powers are known to exist in the settings of both **seaQuest DSV** and **Babylon 5**. But how do these powers function? How common are they? How is their use resolved in game terms?

The game system needs to be able to quantify the characteristics of different types of technology and special powers that exist in the setting in a way that reflects their use in the series. For example, the psychic powers demonstrated on **seaQuest DSV** are of very limited power, and are difficult to use. Any game system in which characters use these powers easily and often does not fit with the way these powers are portrayed in the series, and would therefore be inappropriate.

Defining Character

The next thing to consider when designing the game is character definition; that is, how characters are defined in the game system. Most game systems use a set of statistics that represent the character's abilities in a number of areas. The most common of these are attributes, skills or talents, and special abilities such as magical or psychic powers. Let's consider each of these.

Attributes

Attributes are qualities that define a character in the most general sense. They represent a character's natural assets, without the advantage of training or education. Attributes usually describe a character's physical prowess, his mental aptitudes, and in the case of some game systems, his social or spiritual qualities. Nearly all game systems have a set of attributes that define these aspects of characters, but virtually no two game systems use the same set of attributes. Also, some game systems define certain abilities as attributes that you may think of as skills or talents. When designing or choosing a game system, try to settle on a set of attributes that fits the characters as portrayed on the series.

Skills or Talents

Skills or talents represent specialized types of abilities a character has learned, either on his own or due to his profession. All game systems have some sort of skill or talent list. The difference is often how specific and precise the available skills are. For instance, some game systems have different skills for using revolvers, automatic pistols, shotguns, and rifles. Other systems simply use a more broad type of skill such as 'firearms.'

Some game systems break these types of abilities into classifications. One example of this is the Storyteller System, used in the **World of Darkness** games published by *White Wolf Game Studio*. In this system, abilities are classified as Talents, Skills, or Knowledge. In contrast, **GURPS**, published by *Steve Jackson Games*, classifies all of these types of abilities as skills.

When designing/choosing the game system, you should consider both the type and range of abilities possessed by the characters in the series, and if a given game system handles skills and talents in way in keeping with the series. Also, the game system will need to include any skills or talents that are unique to the series. For instance, a game based on **seaQuest DSV** should probably include skills associated with military training in general, and submarine operations in particular.

Special Abilities

As noted earlier, special abilities are any magical or psychic powers seen on the series. These can run the range from the ability to cast magical spells to ESP and telekinesis. If it is possible for the characters to possess these types of abilities, the game system will need to provide a list of available powers, as well as how the character uses them. Many game systems have rules for these types of abilities, but be careful if you choose to use these. Most game systems have their own internal logic that applies to these powers, and it is unlikely that any of these will accurately reflect the way the powers are portrayed on the series. Each game designer (and TV series producer) has their own idea of how magic and/or psychic powers should work, and it is not very often that any two of these will mesh perfectly. To cite an earlier example, psychic powers on **seaQuest DSV** are rare and difficult to use. The game system you use for a **seaQuest DSV** game should reflect this fact, and not allow easy, common use of psychic powers.

Other Characteristics

There are other types of characteristics that are common in many roleplaying game systems that you may wish to consider when designing your game. The most common of these are what are known as Advantages and Disadvantages or Drawbacks. These are characteristics that either benefit or hinder the character in some way. These are most often natural or inborn, such as impaired vision, phobias, or ambidexterity, but can also include friends, connections, mannerisms, and even social standing. As noted earlier, some game systems use these types of abilities to define some character aspects that other game systems consider attributes or skills.

Very often, these types of abilities can go a long way towards differentiating characters from one another. Also, when 'statting' a series' central characters, using these types of characteristics helps to more precisely define the characters. For instance, one of Indiana Jones' noteworthy characteristics is his fear of snakes. If you were going to base a game on the Indiana Jones movies (*Raiders of the Lost Ark, Indiana Jones and The Temple of Doom,* and *Indiana Jones and The Last Crusade*) and were 'statting' Indy, you would want to include this fear of snakes.

There are other characteristics that should be considered in regards to character definition, but many of these are not directly related to the game system itself. These include things such as personality traits, manners of speech, and beliefs and attitudes. These characteristics or traits are often beyond the scope of many game systems, but are nonetheless important, and should be kept in mind when characters are being either created (if original characters) or 'statted' (if central characters from the series).

Series-Specific Characteristics

The last area of character definition you need to consider are what I call 'series-specific' characteristics. These are traits that are either unique or important to the series. These characteristics can sometimes be related to certain special powers in the series, but can also represent beliefs and attitudes regarding certain aspects of the series' setting. For instance, one of the key ideas on **The X Files** is the difference in beliefs between Agents Mulder and Scully regarding unexplained and paranormal phenomena. Mulder is a true believer, while Scully is more of a skeptic. Characters in a game based on **The X Files** should decide their attitude or beliefs about the paranormal, as this is an important element of that series.

To offer another example, on **seaQuest DSV**, the significance of psychic powers might lead you to note whether each character has any psychic potential (called PSI factor on **seaQuest DSV**) of any kind. While most of the characters do not, it was noted in one episode that Captain Bridger does display a minor PSI factor. To reflect this idea, the description of each character in a game based on this series should have a notation relating to his or her PSI factor.

Like advantages and disadvantages, series-specific characteristics can help to define the characters more precisely, and in ways more keeping with the series.

Defining Actions

This last aspect of RPGs is perhaps the simplest of the three. Defining actions simply means determining how actions are resolved in the game system. At the heart of all stories are the actions taken by its central characters, and all game systems have a method (or methods) for resolving the outcome of the characters actions. While many game systems have a single mechanic for all types of actions, some use different systems for different types of actions, such as skill use and combat. I prefer systems which use a single mechanic for all actions, and the majority of game systems published in the last few years are of this type.

But while this aspect of the game system is very straightforward, there still remains a few things that you should consider when designing or choosing your game system. Chief among these is the ease or difficulty of typical actions. This relates to the 'feel' of the series. Are the characters heroes, who commonly perform outstanding feats of physical prowess, or is it more 'realistic,' or even dark and gritty? Whatever the case, the game system should, if possible, reflect this. For instance, in the **Star Wars** movies, the central characters are larger-than-life heroes who perform amazing feats. A game based on these movies should allow this type of behavior. On the other, **The X Files** is much more realistic in terms of what types of actions the characters are capable of performing.

Another thing to consider is whether the game system allows for varying levels of success, or simple success or failure when attempting actions.

Character Success and Failure

Have you ever noticed that in the series, the characters always succeed when they need to, or rather when the story needs them to? This is one of the advantages writing a story has over roleplaying one; the writer can decide when the characters succeed and fail. The gamemaster and players are never so lucky. The outcome of their actions is tied to the game system. If you've chosen (or designed) an appropriate game system, most of the time things should work out okay; even if they don't, never knowing the outcome of an action a character takes is part of the enjoyment of roleplaying games. But there will be times when a character either should succeed at an action, or (and this should be a rare occurrence) must succeed at an action in order for the story to continue. What do you do to ensure this? Below are a couple of different ways you might want to consider.

First, if the game system has a system of hero points, or karma, or some similar mechanic that allows characters to increase the chance of success of their actions, you can allow the character to use more than the rules normally allow, in hopes that the additional bonuses will help the character succeed at the action. These additional points could be called 'Drama Points' or something similar to reflect their significance.

Another alternative, one that works equally well with systems that have a 'hero point' system and those that don't, is what I call Story Points. Story Points allow a character to automatically succeed at any action that is important to the continuation of the story. Story Points are very powerful, and their use is always subject to the gamemaster's approval. Each character should have only one or two of these at any one time. These points allow the characters to succeed when they need to, or at least when the players think they need to. They also allow the gamemaster a way of ensuring his story continues. However, be careful that the players don't try to abuse this concept: remember the intended purpose of Story Points, to allow the story to continue. Examples of how Story Points might be used include things like finding clues that are crucial to an investigation in a game based on **The X Files**, or piloting the seaQuest out of a subterranean tunnel before an earthquake buries it there in a **seaQuest DSV** game. As noted earlier, it is the gamemaster's job to determine whether the use of a Story Point is allowed or not.

Choosing/Designing the Right System

Now that we've looked at how a game system should define the elements of fiction as they are portrayed in the series, it's time to actually design or choose an appropriate game system. With a few modifications, you may be able to use one of the many games available on the market instead of designing one from the ground up. Few roleplaying games are going to work perfectly for your chosen series. Many may come close to what you want, but virtually any system will need some tweaking and tinkering to get it to fit with your series. What will need to be tweaked and tinkered with? That depends on your series, and the game you choose. One of the reasons for working out the Premise, Elements of Fiction, and Style of Play of the series is to alert you to how the series works and what the important elements of the series are. By referring to these, you can ensure that as you design the game, you are staying true to the series as you have defined it.

In all likelihood, there isn't a single game system that will cover the specific needs of your series without some degree of modifications. The best approach is to determine which of the elements, Setting, Characters, or Actions, is most important, and find a game system that fits that element the best. For instance, on **The X Files**, the characters and what they do are more important than the setting, at least in terms of game mechanics. On the other hand, on the **Thunderbirds**, the Thunderbirds themselves are more important, and a game based on that series needs to use a game system that features solid rules for vehicle operations.

Once you've found a system that fits with the most important element, it shouldn't be too difficult to get the other elements to work. For instance, most game systems have rules for firearms, or communications equipment. All you need to do define the specific types of equipment according the equipment rules of the game system you've chosen.

Of the three elements, I think that the most important one on which to base your decision is Actions. While this may seem unusual, the reason for it is quite simple. The way in which actions are resolved is the heart of any game system. Virtually all other the aspects of a game system are designed to support this function, from characters' ability ratings to how equipment and special powers are used. Once you have found a system for resolving actions that captures the essence of your series, it shouldn't be too difficult to define characters and the setting according to that system. Also, it's often harder to change the nature of how actions are resolved than it is to change how equipment or characters are rated. If your series is one in which characters are heroic, and able to perform remarkable deeds, you need a system that can handle that. Any set of attributes and skills allow for heroic action, but the same is not true for every action-resolution system.

Depending on the style of game you plan to run, you might have to design a character creation system. This will most likely be based on the character creation system from the game system you are using, but it should also reflect specifics of the series, such as special powers or abilities. If you are Playing the Series, you won't need a character creation system, but you will need to do character statistics for all the central characters.

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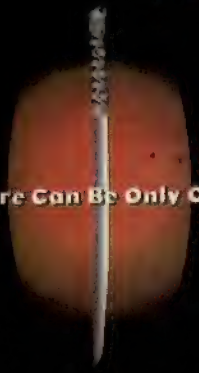

There Can Be Only One.

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SWORDMASTER

A Second Dawn™ Setting

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Also, keep in mind that you needn't limit yourself when choosing a game system. You can pick and choose the parts of a system you like, and throw away the rest. Most game systems are little more than a framework to begin with, one that has been molded to function in a specific way. By changing bits and pieces of the system, you are simply re-molding the same framework to suit your own purposes. How do you do this? Well, there are a lot of ways, and in future article I plan to discuss many of them, but for now, here are just few of the more obvious ones. Again, few specifics are provided here.

When working on character definition, if you like the way a given system rates attributes but don't like the specific attributes that system uses, change the specific attributes used by the system. Use a set of attributes from another game system, or one of your own creation. Do the same for the types of skills or talents. If you prefer that these abilities be classified as they are in the Storyteller System, classify them as such. Add other types of characteristics from other systems as needed, such as Advantages and Disadvantages. The same types of changes can be made in regards to defining the series' setting with the game system. The point is that choosing a game system does not mean that you have to adhere to every specific aspect of that system. The important thing to remember is to make sure the things you change or add make the game system more appropriate for the series. By this time you should know the important aspects of your series; the key is to make sure you remember them when you design the game.

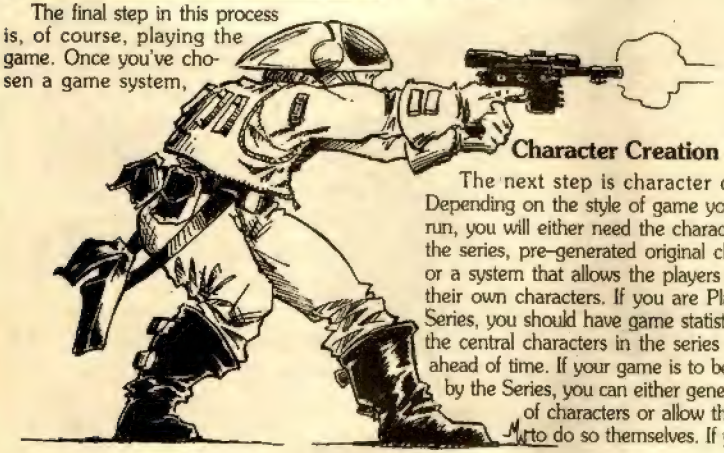
Playing the Game

The final step in this process is, of course, playing the game. Once you've chosen a game system, and modified it as much or as little as you feel necessary, it's time to put all this work to use. When preparing to play, there are a few things you'll need to consider. You need to make sure the players are all familiar with the series, or basis of the game, you need to have characters created either for or by the players, and you need adventures.

Getting the Players Familiar With the Source

This should be a very easy step in the process, as it is likely that most of your players will be familiar with the series you're basing the game on. If this is not the case, you need to familiarize them with the series, preferably in a way that gets them as interested in it as you are. If you are using a television series, the easiest way to do this is to watch video tapes of the episodes which you think best represent what the series is about. If the game is based on a book, lend them the book, assuming you own a copy. If not, borrow it from the library or from a friend if possible. If the game is based on a movie, rent the movie if possible.

If any of these methods proves to be difficult or impossible, you can write up a description of the series from your notes, or you can simply describe it to the players as best you can. This latter method is one that works well if you plan to run this game at a convention, or for a new group of players. If possible, you may be able to find magazine articles or other related types of information, such as trading cards, music soundtracks, or even calendars. Also, many popular television series and movies have all sorts of books and novelties published about them. Try to find some of these to help explain or describe the series to your players.



Character Creation

The next step is character creation. Depending on the style of game you plan to run, you will either need the characters from the series, pre-generated original characters, or a system that allows the players to create their own characters. If you are Playing the Series, you should have game statistics for all the central characters in the series prepared ahead of time. If your game is to be Inspired by the Series, you can either generate a set of characters or allow the players to do so themselves. If you allow the players to create their own characters, is it important that they understand the types of characters that are appropriate to the series.

Story/Adventure Design

Adventure design is something all gamemasters do for all their games they run, so the basics of this task are not going to be addressed here. Instead, let's take a look at some of the ideas to consider when creating adventures and stories based on your series.

Creating Appropriate Plots

Careful observation of the plots of episodes of your series will reveal the types of plots that work best within the setting of the series and with its characters. This is very important when designing adventures, for very often it is the plot, more so than the setting and characters that determines if an adventure is true to its inspiration.

For instance, if your series has been on for a number of years, there has most likely been an episode or two which did not 'feel' right to you. That is, something about them was not quite consistent with the series as you know it. If and when this happens, it is most often due to a faulty plot, or at least ill-conceived events within the plot. This same inconsistency can also occur with inappropriate actions or dialogue from the characters, or an inconsistent description of the setting, but most often a faulty plot is to blame. It is for this reason that you should take care when observing the plots of your series. Even if you get the characters and setting just right, a poor plot can cause a story to feel wrong to the participants.

Adventure Creation Formula

One way to create adventures that are appropriate to the series is to design a system or formula for their design based on common plot elements from the series. One way to create this type of system is to analyze the plots of four or five of your favorite episodes, noting what types of events happen, and how those events progress through the story. If the series has any specific types of events that commonly occur, make a note of it. Once you have a system in place, test the system by creating a few of the original stories from the series, with your system. Don't be discouraged if you have difficulty at first. Many stories which work well in the context of a series do not translate so well to a roleplaying game.

Using Techniques and Trappings

The Techniques and Trappings of your series can be a very important tool in the cre-

ation of adventures and stories based on the series. It is these things which describe how the stories are told, and what those stories are about. This includes capturing the mood and atmosphere of the series, as well as any common themes that are important to the series. These are important ideas to keep in mind when designing adventures.

When designing adventures, refer to your notes regarding Techniques and Trappings to make sure they remain faithful to the series. It is very often a series' Techniques and Trappings that make it so interesting, whether these be the nature of the stories, such as the investigation of the paranormal on **The X Files**, or the cool vehicles on the **Thunderbirds**, or the theme of the struggle between society and the individual on **The Prisoner**. A series' Techniques and Trappings are what you should try to capture in your game, and the best way to do this is to include use them as a guide when creating adventures.

Episodic or Campaign Play

Something else to consider is whether you plan to run the game as an extended campaign, or as a series of episodes. The difference has most to do character development and advancement, but can also impact the types of adventures you design for the game. Episodic games tend to be made up of a series of independent stories, with little connection from episode to episode beyond a consistent setting and characters. Campaign games tend to be made up of series of stories that have some sort of connection, either based on opposing characters, or subplots that run through a number of separate adventures.

An episodic game is better suited when you are Playing the Series, as the characters will remain relatively the same throughout most of the game, with little in terms of skill advancement or growth.

A campaign game is well suited for a game that is Inspired by the Series, as this type of game can continue in its own direction, without having to remain strictly true to the series. Also, since the players most often have their own characters in this style of game, those character can change and grow over time. This means you will have to design some sort of experience system that allows the characters to develop their skills and abilities.

Potential Challenges

There are any number of possible challenges associated with running a game based on a series. These are not meant to discourage you, but instead to advise you on potential situations that may arise. First, it is possible that the series you thought would be so cool as a roleplaying game simply isn't. Despite your best efforts, it is possible that what makes the series so unique and interesting (to you) simply doesn't translate well into a game. Secondly, you may find that your players don't find the series as interesting as you did, or perhaps they may have difficulty getting into the spirit of the series. Many series that I think would make a fun basis for a roleplaying game require that the participants embrace the premise of the series, accepting its inherent assumptions and possible flaws.

The style of play you choose can also lead to problems. For instance, if your game is Inspired by the Series, you may have difficulty in getting the players to create appropriate characters. If you are Playing the Series, a very likely challenge is the number of characters versus the number of players. Below is a solution to this type of problem.

The Character Pool

The Character Pool allows a relatively small group of players to play a large group of characters, and also provides a framework that allows players to switch between characters between adventure. Note that the Character Pool is not suggested for new, relatively inexperienced players.

The central idea of the Character Pool is that the whole group of players works together to portray the entire cast of characters. Using this method, each player agrees to roleplay a number of characters, anywhere from two to four, as required by the series. The exact number of characters each player plays will depend on the number of characters in the series and the number of players. Most often, this works best if each of the players has one main character, who will be involved in the majority of the story, while the secondary characters are played only in scenes in which the secondary characters are important.

As an example, suppose you were playing a game based on **seaQuest DSV**. There are eleven characters on the series, including Darwin the dolphin. A group this large would be very difficult to run smoothly, especially while trying to maintain the interest of all the players throughout the game. Now, let's suppose you have a group of five players for your **seaQuest DSV** adventure. Each of these players could be responsible for two characters (excluding Darwin, who would probably work out well as an gamemaster character anyway). When assigning characters to each of the players, split the characters up, so that each has a main character and a secondary character. For instance, the adventure you plan to run focuses on five of the characters, namely Captain Bridger, Dr. Wendy Smith, Ensign Henderson, Lt. Brody, and Seaman Tony Piccolo. Each of the players should get to roleplay one of these five, as well as one of the other five characters, Lucas Wolenczak, Lt. O'Neill, Commander Ford, Dagwood, and Lt. Ortiz. During the adventure, the players switch between their main character and secondary character, depending on the story. For instance, suppose one of the players is playing both Dr. Smith and Lt. O'Neill. When a message comes from U.E.O. headquarters, this player would play Lt. O'Neill, while later on, when Dr. Smith was needed in the story, the player would switch to playing Dr. Smith. Each of the players would switch back and forth like this as the story progresses.

Another way to use the Character Pool is to have the players change characters between adventures. For instance, the player described above, who played Dr. Smith and Lt. O'Neill, might play Captain Bridger and Tony Piccolo in the next adventure, and Commander Ford and Lt. Ortiz in the next. This allows all the players to eventually play all the characters, and also helps to keep things fresh for both the players and the gamemaster.

At the beginning of this article, its purpose was 'to offer guidelines for taking a source, be it a television show or series, a movie, or book, and using it as the basis for a roleplaying game.' I like to think that I've achieved that purpose, and that the information in this article is useful to you both as a way for you to develop a game based on your favorite TV series or movie, and as a new way of looking at roleplaying games that you hadn't before considered.

I'm anxious to get your feedback on the ideas in this article, as well as any criticisms or comments. You can write to me, Lou Prosperi, c/o SHADIS or e-mail me (fasalou@aol.com). Thanks. ❑

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Bits n' Pieces

Rumors, New Products, Etc.

By Mark Arsenault

Welcome to the first ever "all Hollywood" edition of **Bits & Pieces!**

Television News

NBC struck a deal with **CST Entertainment** to produce a sci-fi anthology series, consisting of colorized and re-edited camp movies of the '50s and '60s. The films will be condensed into a half-hour format. NBC plans to air four of those half-hours this summer under the title *Alien Encounters*. The two-hour show will consist of clips from B movies such as *Killers From Space* and *Wasp Woman*. Other films planned for the series include *Devil Girl From Mars*, *Navy vs. the Night Monsters*, *Women of the Prehistoric Planet* and *Teenagers from Outer Space*.

Want to go to Mars? Then watch for **Special Report: Journey to Mars,** an upcoming *CBS* television movie, starring Judge Reinhold, Alfre Woodars and Keith Carradine. The dramatic movie is about the first attempt by humans to land on Mars and the people who make it possible.

Cable News

Home Box Office (HBO) reached a licensing agreement with **DreamWorks,** the new entertainment company formed by Steven Spielberg, Jeffrey Katzenberg and David Geffen. The 10-year, exclusive film license covers all of Dreamworks' productions, beginning in 1996. Estimated licensing fees could reach $1 billion, according to industry sources.

Movie News

David N. Twohy, one of the writers of Kevin Costner's upcoming movie **Waterworld**, took out a full page ad in two movie trade publications a while back. In the ads, Twohy printed a letter he'd written to industry insiders, in which he told them to "shut the hell up" about the movie's cost overruns and other problems.

"If you're in this industry — if your job orbits around the writing, the shooting, the editing, the marketing, even the reviewing of movies — let me give you a tip: Stop gnawing on the hand that feeds you," Twohy wrote. "Just shut the hell up until the movie comes out." The letter was published the same day that the Wall Street Journal published a story claiming that **Waterworld** could be the most expensive movie in history, with an estimated cost of $150-175 million. Ouch!

Paul Hogan, of **Crocodile Dundee** fame, has signed on to star in Universal's upcoming film adaption of "**Flipper**," the television series about that mega-smart dolphin. The series ran from 1964-1968. Hogan will play Uncle Porter, a fisherman who has to deal with a rebellious nephew and assorted thugs who are dumping toxic waste. With a reported $20 million budget, the film is slated to be released in the summer of '96.

Trimark Pictures has signed producer/writer Matty Rich to do a new film, called **War Zone**, a low-budget (i.e. under $5 million) drama about a black youth who meets up with a corrupt New York cop.

Work is underway on a live-action movie version of Disney's **Pinocchio**. The film will star Martin Landau as Geppetto and Johnathon Taylor Thomas (from **Home Improvement**) as the doll, er, I mean boy. Whatever. The 11-week filming schedule begins July 9th in England, followed by location shooting in Prague. No word on a release date.

Anthony Hopkins, who chillingly portrayed the psycho Hannibal Lector in **Silence of the Lambs**, will star in Oliver Stone's upcoming film, **Nixon**. Filming is set to begin in May, in Washington D.C.

Arnold Schwarzenegger has signed on to star in **Eraser**, a Warner Bros. action-thriller directed by Chuck Russell. In it, Arnie plays a jaded U.S. Marshal working in the Witness Protection Program who goes toe to toe with another agent against a backdrop of government cover-up and intrigue. Sounds good to me.

Arnold is also lined up to star in a remake of the classic 1960s film **Planet of the Apes**, for 20th Century Fox. The project is currently in development. Word has it that the film will be directed by Oliver Stone (**Platoon**), and has a slightly different storyline than the classic.

Mel Brooks will turn his comedic talents toward the great Count in **Dracula: Dead and Loving It**. Leslie Nielson (**Airplane** and **The Naked Gun**) plays the title role. Filming is scheduled to begin in May.

Steve Reuther and Michael Douglas have purchased **Extreme Denial**, an unpublished novel by David Morrell, for a sum reportedly exceeding $1 million. **Extreme Denial** is a story about a CIA operative who retires on his 40th birthday and moves to Santa Fe, where he falls in love with a woman who disappears after her house explodes. Expectedly, the operative slips into spy mode and searches for his lost love. The novel will be published by Warner Bros. in the spring of '96. The movie will be produced by Douglas Reuther Productions, and distributed by Paramount. According to Reuther, it is too early to decide whether Michael Douglas will take the lead role.

By now, everyone knows about the soon-to-be released **Batman Forever**, which will star Val Kilmer as the caped crusader, Chris O'Donnell as the boy wonder, Jim Carrey as Riddler, and Tommy Lee Jones as Two-Face. Also in the film are Drew Barrymore and Debbi Mazer, who play bad girls Sugar and Spice, respectively. Word is that there is a "new" Batmobile, and glimpses of Arkham Asylum. Boy, Chris Avellone ought to love that. The producers have promised a more action-oriented film this time around. We'll see if they deliver.

Terry Gilliam, of Monty Python fame, is working on a new film, called **The Twelve Monkeys**. The sci-fi film stars Bruce Willis, Brad Pitt, Madeleine Stowe, and Christopher Plummer. Filming began February 9th in Philadelphia.

Silver Star International and Cine Excel Entertainment announced the (apparent) release, or "impending release," of **Future War**, an action adventure film directed by Anthony Dublin. The story involves an alien fugitive (Bernhardt) who is being pursued by an evil cyborg (Z'Dar), and gets involved with a nun (Stewart), all the while the FBI and local cops are getting torn up by the cyborg's tracker T-Rexes. Would I lie to you? All I'm telling you is what I've heard or read.

Famous horror genre author Clive Barker has said that he was sickened by the violence in **Pulp Fiction** and **Interview with the Vampire**. Commenting on the scene in **Vampire** in which Brad Pitt and Tom Cruise crack jokes while a prostitute bleeds to death in an alley, Barker said "It revolted the hell out of me." His comment came at the annual World Horror Convention in Atlanta. Barker, author of horror novels such as **Candyman** and **Hellraiser**, called on fellow horror writers to abandon vampires and werewolves, and to start writing stories in which the good guys outshine the monsters.

James Cameron has written **Strange Days**, which is in production and due for a Fall '95 release. The film, starring Ralph Fiennes, Angela Bassett, Juliette Lewis and Tom Sizemore, is set on the eve of the millenium — December 31, 1999. Fiennes plays an ex-cop on the fringe, who deals in "gray market" goods. Specifically, he sells "sensory recordings" (a la **Brainscan**) and winds up getting in the middle of a murderous cover-up. "**Strange Days** is at bottom a *film noir*," said co-writer Jay Cocks. "It's tough-guy

stuff and wisecracking dialogue and an irredeemably dark story. A few rays of light here and there, but very, very intense."

Video News

The Lion King easily took its place as the king of video releases. Within a short seven days after its late-February release, more than 26 million copies had been sold, making **The Lion King** the biggest selling video release of all time, surpassing **Snow White** and **Aladdin**, which are in the number two and three slots, now.

MCA/Universal Home Video has entered the special edition laser disc market with the release of **Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story**, the first title in the *Signature Collection* series of laser discs.

Other titles scheduled for release in the Signature Collection series later this year are special editions of **Street Fighter**, **1941**, and **Field of Dreams**, as well as a special, stand-alone documentary of the making of **Jurassic Park**. A special edition of Steven Spielberg's **Jaws** is also in development, but has yet to be approved.

In Production

The following movies are currently in various stages of production. The last names of the main stars are listed in parenthesis when known. Titles marked with a "*" are in preproduction.

Unfortunately there was not enough room to list all of the movies that are in preparation or development. Still, this should give you movie buffs something to chew on for a while.

Animation

All Dogs Got to Heaven II (C. Sheen, S. Easton, D. DeLuise)
Balto (B. Hoskins, P. Collins, K. Anderson)
Cats Don't Dance (N. Cole, E. Asner, H. Holbrook, R. Auberjonois)
Fantasia Continued
Feathertop (working title)
The Frog Prince
The Goofy Movie (J. Masden, B. Farmer)
The Hunchback of Notre Dame (D. Moore, K. Kline, T. Hulce)
James and the Giant Peach (M. Margolyes)
Pocahontas (M. Gibson, I. Bedard)
The Thief of Always
Toy Story (T. Allen, T. Hanks, D. Rickles)

Action Adventure

187*
The Asphalt Quartet (Pastorelli, G. Plummer)
Assassins* (S. Stallone, A. Banderas)
Atomic Blue, Mexican Wrestler* (J. Guadalajara)
Batman Forever (V. Kilmer, T.L. Jones, J. Carrey, C. O'Donnell)
Boundless*
The Crucible* (C. Stone, A. Tompkins)
Cutthroat Island (G. Davis, M. Modine, F. Langella)
The Defender*
Endless Winter
Five Winter Stories
Goldeneye (P. Brosnan, Bean)
Jarok's Fortune*
Jumanji (R. Williams, B. Hunt, D.A. Grier)
Man With a Gun (M. Madsen, J. Tilly, G. Busey)
Mission Impossible* (T. Cruise, J. Voigt)
The Money Train (W. Snipes, W. Harrelson)
The North Star (C. Lambert, J. Caan, B. Young)
North's War (B. Bosworth, B. Payne)
The Quest (J. Van Damme, R. Moore)
Self Sanction*
Virtuosity (D. Washington, Lynch)

Comedy

Ace Ventura II* (J. Carrey)
All Points Between (Zappa, Ryan)
Baby Sitter's Club (Horton, Adams)
Big Bully (Arnold, Moranis)
Bogus* (G. Depardieu, W. Goldberg)
Chat with the Bat* (R.D. Logan)
Cosi (Mendelsohn, Otto)
Critic's Choice*
Dunston Checks In* (J. Alexander, E. Lloyd)
Father of the Bride 2 (S. Martin, D. Keaton)
Flirting With Disaster (B. Stiller, L. Tomlin, A. Alda, G. Segal)
Get Shorty (J. Travolta, G. Hackman, D. DeVito)
Home for the Holidays (H. Hunter, R. Downey Jr.)
House Arrest* (J.L. Curtis, K. Pollak)
If Lucy Fell (E. Schaeffer, E. MacPherson)
In the West* (G. Fowler, M. Perella)
Mall Rats (S. Doherty, J. Lee)
Multiplicity* (M. Keaton)
The Nutty Professor* (E. Murphy)
Red Ribbon Blues (P. Mercurio, D. Mazar)
Sabrina (H. Ford, Ormond)
Sgt. Bilko* (S. Martin, D. Aykroyd)
Shooters*
The Size of the Tragedy*
Steal Big, Steal Little (A. Garcia, A. Arkin)
Temecula* (J. Lemmon, R. Lewis)
The Truth About Cats and Dogs* (U. Thurman, J. Garofalo)
Two Much (M. Griffith, D. Hannah, D. Aiello)
Use Your Head (C. Smith, K. Aderer)
Waiting to Exhale (W. Houston, G. Hines, A. Bassett)

Drama

The American President (Douglas, Sheen, Dreyfuss)
Beautiful Girls (M. Dillon, Emmerich, Hutton)
Before and After (Meryl Streep, Liam Neesan)
Cafe (Arcoleo, Cook)
Cashing In (C. Phillips, Dremman)
Double Cross* (L. Fishburne, K. Sutherland)
Fargo (McDormand, Buscemi)
Fast Sofa* (J. Busey, C. Glover, J. Russo)
Heat (Pacino, DeNiro, Kilmer)
The Indian in the Cupboard (Scardino, Litefoot)
Inside (R. Maylone, S. O'Hara)
It's My Party (E. Roberts, M. Matlin, G. Harrison)
Jade (Caruso, Palminteri)
James Dean*
La Proprietaire* (J. Moreau)
The Last Dance* (S. Stone, R. Morrow, Q. Latifah)
Lucky Star Shanghai* (M. Rourke, M. Lu, C. Eann)
Mercy (J. Rubenstein, J. Lanier)
Nowhere Man (A. LaPaglia, M. Hardin)
Powder (S.P. Flanery, J. Goldblum)
The Soldier and Simoom* (B. Daniels)
Sydney* (P.B. Hall, J. Reilly, S. Jackson)
Things I Never Told You (A. McCarthy, L. Taylor)
Three Wishes (P. Swayze, J. Mazzello)
Tortured Earth* (R. Young)
Total Eclipse (L. DiCaprio, D. Thewlis)
Untitled Basketball Project (Perlman, Starr)
Up Close and Personal* (R. Redford, M. Pfeiffer)
Watching You*
White Squall* (J. Bridges)

Family

A Little Miracle (R. Hench, A. Zeltina)
The Last Home Run (T. Guiry, S. Cassel)
The Muppet Treasure Island (K. Frog, M. Piggy)

Horror

Bloodshed and Emeralds (Joel, Womack)
Bordello of Blood*
Witchcraft VII: A Taste for Blood (L. Schmalle)

Musical

The Fantasticks (McIntyre, Grey, Morris)

Science Fiction

Habitat (B. Getty, T. Karyo)
Proteus* (C. Fairbrass)
The Twelve Monkeys (Willis, Stowe, Pitt)

Thriller

Dead Cold (L. Anthony, Mulkey)
Deviant Behavior*
Evil Obsession (C. Feldman, James)
Fair Game (W. Baldwin, Crawford)
Land of Milk and Honey (L. Cavazos, R. Panebianco)
Mind Lies
Mulholland Falls* (N. Nolte, C. Palminteri)
The Net (Sandra Bullock)
Never Talk to Strangers (R. De Mornay, H.D. Stanton)
Out of Darkness (M. Kemp, J. Burns)
Seven (B. Pitt, M. Freeman)
A Whisper in the Attic*
Widow's Kiss (B. D'Angelo, M. Astin)

Epilogue

I hope you all enjoyed this special Hollywood Edition of Bits and Pieces. I'll see you all in 30 days for our regular Bits and Pieces column in SHADIS. See you at the movies! ❑

Wizards™ Revisited

Advanced Rules for Whit Publication's Wizards RPG

By Jeff Zitomer © 1995 • Illustrated by Lorelle Ahlstrom © 1995

*Whit Publications' **Wizards** RPG is based on Ralph Bakshi's Wizards and the movie of the same name. The animated movie Wizards came out in 1977 and became a cult classic among gaming circles around the country. "You killed Fritz!" and "Here's a little trick Mom showed me when you weren't around," became catch phrases in more than one campaign.*

The following rules were originally slated to become part of the Wizards Advanced Player's Handbook. When that project fell through, the author made them available for publication in SHADIS and we readily accepted.

Please note that the following material is in no way 'official' and has not been approved for use with Wizards by Whit Publications.

Editor

Racial Advantages:

The following are *free* (i.e. zippo CGP cost!) for the listed races and do not count against the five advantage maximum:

Dwarves: 50' Nightvision. This isn't infravision, but the ability to see in minimal light. Beyond this range, the character will only be able to see shadows and vague shapes. However, the character is somewhat light-sensitive and PER rolls are –1 under bright conditions. Gnomes may purchase this as an advantage (without the PER limitation) for 2 CGP; 3 CGP for the other Faerie races.

Fairies: It was assumed, but never specifically stated in the rules that Fairies can fly. Players should be aware that fairies make noise when they fly; the flapping of their tiny wings sounds like the chirping of crickets. Fairy wings resemble gossamer insect wings but are more flexible. If necessary, a fairy could easily wear a cloak or loose-fitting jacket.

Elflings: Elflings have vestigial fairy wings, and although they are too big to fly, they can use their wings to provide

added balance. In game terms, elflings gain a bonus of +1 with Climbing, Dodge and Tumbling rolls. Like fairies, elflings can disguise their wings under a large cloak.

Robot Player Characters

With their Game Master's approval, players can play a rogue robot. Use the basic attributes listed on page 96. There are many advantages to playing a robot. They look cool, get some pretty exclusive skills and can carry Big Guns. However, there are many significant drawbacks which should be carefully considered by any player who sees a robot character as the ultimate opportunity to kick butt:

- Robots do not need to eat or sleep.
- Robots are immune to poison, disease and radiation.
- Robots do not have a Technological Stigma (see Disadvantages section). Yep, use 'em if ya got 'em.
- Robots may select the Assassin or Machinist skill packages.

And now the bad news:

- There may only be one robot per party. Rogue robots are very uncommon.
- Robots have the Distinctive Appearance disadvantage (this does not count against the 5 disadvantage limit).
- Robots must take at least one mental disadvantage. This aberration is a side effect of going rogue. It is strongly suggested that the robot also take the Enemies disadvantage. Such is the life of a professional killer.
- Robots represent the evil that can be achieved through technology. They should not expect a warm welcome in the Faerie lands. Does *FRANKENSTEIN* ring a bell?
- Robots can use magic items and they can be affected by magic just like anyone else, including mental spells, but they can never learn to use magic.
- Blackwolf will reprogram the robot ever gets his hands on it again. Dead robots can be rebooted in Scortch 1. Since the robot will retain all memories, their previous travelling companions will be in grave danger. You were warned.

Charisma

The cost to improve Charisma (for PCs only) is now 4 CGP. The reason for this is that the characters from the movie tend to be charismatic. The characters should be too.

Luck Points

A Luck point may be used in one of four ways:

- To increase HP and SP totals from zero or below to 1.
- To make any skill attempt an Ace. Don't bother rolling, go straight to the Ace results table.
- To do maximum damage in any successful attack (as though a 6 was rolled on each damage die).
- Optional at GMs discretion: to change a Blunder into a normal failure.

Background Skills for PCs

Increase the starting CGP total to 50. The extra 10 points may only be used toward the purchase of background skills. These represent the skills taught and encouraged by each community during the character's formative years. These skills:

- Count toward the 4 level improvement limit.
- Cannot be used to purchase or improve Impossible level skills.
- Cannot be used by Faeries to purchase technological skills (i.e. Small Arms, Vehicles).
- Must include at least one level of the following:

Elves: Trade or Riding

Dwarf: Linguist (Dwarrow)* and either Blacksmith or Mining (see New Skills)

Gnome: Linguist (Dwarrow)* and Instruction

Fairy: Bard or Carousing (see New Skills)

Elfling: Bard or Seduce

Mutant NPCs: Linguist (Rad or German) and Survival

* Assuming the character was from a region where the predominant language is Elvan, such as East Elfland or Montagar (see Common Skills, page 23). If not, swap this for Elvan and the character's primary language will be Dwarrow.

Names

We didn't spot this one until we designed characters for our demos at GenCon! Very few Faeries have surnames. Faeries will identify themselves in formal situations by stating their name, followed by their father's name, and their official occupation (properly embellished to sound important).

Red Elves: Named after natural events, like the Indians. ex. Weehawk, Hartmoon

Yellow Elves: Arabic or Norse names. ex. Abdul

Brown Elves: British names (first or last) or places. ex. Alfie, Brighton

Dwarves: Husky first names followed by a personal adjective. Particularly reclusive Dwarves will only provide their nickname to strangers, preferring not to reveal something as personal as their birth name. ex. Hank Grumble, Frank Baldskull

Gnomes: Use the surnames of appropriate writers and philosophers. ex. Asimov (for a scientist), Thoreau (for a naturalist)

Fairies: Medieval historical names work well, especially British names. ex. Rupert, Sean, Charlemagne

Elflings: These names should be ethereal and somewhat biblical-sounding. ex. Elinore, Delia, Abraham, Endora

Mutants: German first names are popular, especially if the character is in the military. For obvious reasons, mutant names are usually simple. ex. Fritz, Max, Ork, Charlie, Archie

New Advantages & Changes

Ace _____: Cost = Variable

For three CGPs, the character is naturally gifted with one specific skill. This skill may be improved up to 6 levels, not 4, using CGPs. For five, six or seven CGPs, the skill is also considered one difficulty level easier, minimum of Easy, for purposes of improvement. The cost is 5 for a Normal skill, 6 for Difficult, 7 for Impossible

Berserker: Cost = 6 (5 for Elves)

The character is a fighting machine. In melee, instead of parrying and attacking, this character may make two attacks, instead. Remember, consecutive attacks on the same target receive a +1 bonus to hit. See page 69 in the basic rules for rules on the order of attacks.

Big: Cost = 5

The character is a giant among his own kind. The player may purchase 1 Size level beyond the normal +25% limit.

Common Sense: Cost = 3 (PCs only)

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The player may ask the GM if they are about to do something incredibly stupid. The GM should only answer with a yes or no, and not provide advice. This is a useful advantage for beginners.

Cool: Cost = Variable

Avatar: "I'll tell you, if you think you can handle it."

For three CGPs, the character is the epitome of self-confidence. He is always in control and remains calm even when stressed out. He gains a +1 bonus to resist Fast Talk, Interrogate and Seduce attempts. For six CGPs, the character is a human rock. He also gains a +1 bonus to resist the effects of panic or torture.

Destiny: Cost = Variable

(Only Faeries and major NPCs)

"She [Elinore] told them she would return as queen of Montagar, her father's death avenged and herself, a full-fledged fairy."

This is a major theme in Wizards. Even history is destined to repeat itself as the horrors of the Second World War are replayed on a future battlefield. Because of dreams, obligations or expectations, the course and outcome of the character's whole life has been predetermined. However, the future is not immutable, and the character may always change their mind once the times comes. For example, Elinore decided not to become the queen of Montagar at the end of the film. This advantage costs 1–5 CGPs, depending upon the value and importance of this future event. Becoming a decorated war hero might be worth 3 CGPs, but being crowned king is worth 5 CGPs. A character who completes their established goals should merit the appropriate advantage(s).

Eagle Eye: Cost = 3

(Example of a failed roll) Sean: "Assassins! Get dow . . ." BLAM!

The character gains a bonus of +2 with any awareness roll relying upon eyesight.

Fearless:

This advantage should be chosen as an anti-phobia. It cannot be taken in conjunction with combat, magic or technology, which falls under the No Technological Stigma advantage.

Good Arm: Cost = 4

If baseball still existed, you'd be pitching in the major leagues. The character can throw a standard projectile 5 times his Might in yards and gains a +1 bonus at medium range.

Good Hearing: Cost = 3

Weehawk: "I sense something..."

The character gains a bonus of +2 with any awareness roll relying upon hearing.

Hangers-On: Cost = 4

"He [Blackwolf] built a small following of frog-like creatures, but needed more troops for his evil plans."

The character has an NPC who follows him everywhere. Maybe the NPC wants to become an apprentice, join the rebellion, or bask in the glory of their hero — whether he likes it or not. This NPC may be annoying and somewhat incompetent (double experience cost to improve attributes and skills), but followers normally don't come free. This one does. Although he'll do the character's bidding, he isn't stupid or suicidal. The character gains 1/10 the experience earned by the NPC, unless the NPC drops dead. The points spent on this advantage are lost unless the GM decides to provide a suitable replacement. Remember this before using him as a shield!

High Alcohol Tolerance: Cost = 2

Avatar: "I wonder if I packed my scotch?"

The character can hold his booze. +3 bonus to Resistance when indulging in alcohol.

Honored Name: Cost = 2

(Only Red and Yellow Elves)

The clannish Red and Yellow Elves revere and honor the spirits of their fallen brethren. The most promising young warriors are awarded their names in the ritual coming-of-age. It is believed that the act will inspire them to even greater feats of glory and infuse them with some of the greatness of the fallen spirit. Weehawk is sure to be a powerful name in future generations. The character receives a +1 CHA bonus when dealing with the other members of his tribe. In fact, the ross is such an important part of their society that these beasts are often named after heroic and faithful predecessors.

Inheritance: Cost = 4

The character is filthy rich, but not necessarily a snob. His clothing and supplies are of the best possible quality and he probably has acquaintances among "high society" (not as valuable as Contacts). He starts with an additional 100 GP worth of supplies and a ross (if appropriate), and may pick up an additional 50 GP whenever he returns home.

Lucky: Cost = 5

Pretty self-explanatory. Once per game session, the player may opt to either:

- Reroll a failed roll, unless it was a Blunder; or
- Force an NPC to reroll a success, unless it was an Ace.

Players should be cautious when invoking this advantage, because whether the second roll stays — for better or worse.

Magical Immunity: Cost = 4

For some reason, magical energy does not flow freely through the character. The character gains +3 Spirit for defensive purposes only. However, the character's Spirit is reduced by 3 when casting spells. Consequently, very few of these individuals ever learn to use magic efficiently.

Mentor: Cost = Variable

Elinore: "'Banish him!?!' But Father, who will teach me all the magic I have left to learn?"

This is a variation on the Contacts advantage. The character is still on good terms with his mentor/trainer. For two CGPs, the character's mentor will render advice, aid and free training whenever available. As an experienced NPC, this character must have the relevant professional skills with a score of 10 or more (including the Instruction skill), and at least 3 points higher than the player. For four CGPs, the character's mentor also has the Status or Renown advantage at no cost.

Mount: Cost = Variable

Weehawk: "The mission is nearly over, Westwind. But now it's time for one, final run."

For 4 (3 for Elves) CGPs, the character owns a very loyal mount, probably a ross. If necessary, it will sacrifice itself for the character. It has an above-average intelligence for the species and will respond to vocal commands. The mount has learned one attack maneuver at its DEX base +5 (modified by the difficulty of the maneuver). Naturally, the character is very attached to the mount and would be devastated if it died. For 6 (5 for Elves) CGPs, the mount is a superior specimen and gains a +1 CON and +1 MR.

Natural Leader: Cost = 3

Blackwolf: "Attention, leaders of tomorrow's master race!"

When the character speaks, people listen. So long as the character seems sin-

cere and knowledgeable, he gains a +1 bonus with Leadership and Oratory.

Nightvision: see Racial Advantages: Dwarves.

No Technological Stigma: (See Disadvantages) Cost = 4

Elinore: "Magic and technology?!?!"

For whatever reason, your character feels comfortable around technology and has no moral difficulties using it. Technology can be a wonderful tool when used properly, but some of your contemporaries may not be as "enlightened," and may take offense to your casual attitude. When you consider that most faeries believe that technology destroyed the world, it's not too tough to understand why they wouldn't want to have it around.

Renown: Cost = Variable

Abdul: "Avatar, you old fool, you've come! Oh, our father's returned!"

Word has spread about some positive aspect of the character, either his skills, personality or past deeds. Depending upon the audience, this could result in any number of benefits to the character, from respect to free lodging. For three CGPs, the character will be recognized on a successful Charisma roll. The audience will react with vague interest or appreciation. For five CGPs, the character will be recognized with a +3 modifier. Word will have spread to places the character hasn't even heard of. People will want to know all about him and may ask for demonstrations or stories. For eight CGPs, the character is instantly recognized worldwide, and may have become the stuff of legend. Avatar has this advantage at this level.

Spell-Like Powers: Cost = 5 for Fairies, 7 for Elflings

Avatar: "Stop this childish display! Why, even at elves' houses I've seen more sophisticated magic!"

This advantage is only available to Fairies and Elflings. These are innately magical creatures and many develop spell-like powers without any formal instruction in the complexities of magic. To reflect this, the character may select one spell, either from the list of common magic or a customized spell. This spell is cast according to the magic rules, but the character's current Spirit is used as the skill base. This power can be practiced according to the rules on page 78.

Superior Equipment: Cost = 3

The character owns one superior weapon or suit of armor — probably a family heirloom or special gift. The character purchases the equipment at normal cost, except the weapon will do +2 damage, and armor will absorb +2 SP. Both have -1 Might.

Time Sense: Cost = 2

The character has no need for a sundial or a watch — they simply know what time it is. They can also predict the time of dawn and dusk. A useful ability for the outdoor types.

Tough:

Both levels may be purchased for four points.

Visions: Cost = 6

King Dolan: "We have been sent death images and humans, each with a different story."

The character may be "sent" symbolic visions while relaxed and meditating or sleeping. It is up to the GM to decide when they will occur. These visions may be of the character, someone he knows, or someone he will meet. The content of the vision may refer to the past, present or future. The future, however, is not set in stone and may be altered if the character strives to do so. A PER roll is required to understand the symbolic significance of the vision. The better the roll, the clearer the GM should describe the vision. These insights never lie, but may not come to pass, either. If the roll fails, the experience is interpreted incorrectly. A blunder indicates that the meaning is completely confused — possibly backwards.

Wizard Blood: Cost = 15 (Faerie characters only)

"The older faerie instantly knew that these were not ordinary twins, but magical wizards."

The character is probably the result of one of Avatar's earlier "exploits." The character is extremely long-lived; the new lifespan is 1d6 x 1000 years! In addition, Magic is considered a Difficult skill for purposes of improvement, but not initial generation. Finally, the character may also learn Technomancy, but may not necessarily begin with the skill. It should also be noted that Blackwolf would almost certainly put a bounty on the character's head.

Worldly: Cost = 4

Abdul: "Misty moons ago, he strode this planet like a messiah, curing radiation sickness from man and bird."

This character probably spent most of his childhood traveling from place to place. Evenly divide the character's initial lore skill (see Common Skills on page 23) among three different Area Lore or City Lore skills.

New Disadvantages & Changes:

Apathetic: Value = 3

Avatar: "Ah, there's no time for that. Even if we could impress our people with the danger . . ."

This is a fairly common problem in the Faerie lands, and the primary reason why Blackwolf's forces have not encountered significant resistance. It's not that the character doesn't give a damn, it's just that he's so set in his daily routine, he finds it difficult to believe that anything could alter it. As a result, he is difficult to

rouse to action. The character has a +1 bonus to resist Oratory or Leadership, but suffers a -3 when using these skills.

Alfie: "It's always been that way and will always be the same."

Bogus Habit: Value = Variable

The character unconsciously does something that is really annoying or disgusting to watch. This disadvantage must be purchased in two parts: the grossness of the habit and the frequency of occurrence.

For one CGP, the character's habit gets stares, and occasionally, giggles. Examples include belching, drooling and raucous laughter. Unless the character makes a CHA roll (or a suitable substitute, such as Guile or Fast talk), he will get looks from the people around him. He will suffer a −1 penalty to appropriate CHA skills only if the indiscretion was extremely inappropriate (i.e. picking your nose in front of the queen).

For three CGPs, the character is pretty disgusting. Examples include coughing up phlegm and spitting on people when you talk. Unless a CHA roll (or viable substitute) is made at −5, appropriate CHA skills will be at a −1 to −3 penalty, depending upon the situation.

For five CGPs, the character literally makes people sick. Examples include severe halitosis that could cripple a moose and flatulence. Don't bother making CHA skill rolls, people just don't want to deal with you once this problem has cropped up. Previous negotiations might fall through unless the character has planned ahead.

For an additional CGP, the problem does not occur very often. It might occur once during a given social situation on a roll of 1 on 1d6.

For an additional two CGPs, the problem has a 50–50 chance of occurring during a given situation.

For an additional three CGPs, the problem will definitely occur. Just pray you can blame someone else. Pointing at an old guy might work in some cases. It's worth a shot.

Compulsion: Value = 2

Weehawk: "Don't be sad, Elinore. I'll kill that monster as soon as he shows us that projector."

The character must either perform or avoid a certain specified behavior. For example, a priest might vow to abstain from alcohol or sex, and a practical joker might not be able to resist pulling a stunt on someone. On a failed WP check, the character gives in to temptation, but will probably suffer from guilt over their lapse of willpower.

Dead Broke: Value = 2

Maybe the character was recently mugged or squandered his money away on women and booze — whatever, the character begins the game with no gold pieces and no steady job. Of course, he cannot purchase money with extra CGPs. This character might have to take any reasonable offer to earn his daily bread, although a generous GM might allow this character some rations and simple supplies. The character does not have a permanent home.

Destiny: Value = Variable

(Only Faeries and major NPCs)

Elinore: "I must avenge my father's death!"

Just as Avatar knew that he would have to confront his brother, the character's life is doomed to culminate in a situation he'd rather avoid. Like a Shakespearean pawn, the character cannot escape his fate, whether he is aware of it or not. Note that this does not mean that the character will lose or die, but he won't be any better off. As a disadvantage, this is worth 1–5 CGPs to the character, depending upon the severity. A character who must seek revenge against a superior foe might get 3 CGPs for this disadvantage, whereas a character who is doomed to betrayal by a Close Personal Tie might get 5. The effect upon the character is what's important here.

Foul-Mouthed: Value = 3

Avatar: "I'm glad you changed your last name, you son of a bitch!"

You've got a mouth that your own mother wouldn't kiss. It seems that you can't let a sentence get by without an colorful expletive or two. As a result, you suffer a −3 penalty to Social rolls. You may also suffer a penalty to other Charisma rolls whenever such language would be detrimental.

Glory Hound: Value = 3

Max: "Oh damn. There you go again, stepping on my lines, raining on my parade, costing me medals!"

Like our old buddy Max, the character can't resist an opportunity to look good for his peers, and drools over the thought of medals, commendations, fame — even if the character already has the Status advantage! Really unscrupulous individuals might even backstab their companions to get the recognition they crave . . .

Infamous: Value = Variable

"He is called Necron 99 . . . He travels the land destroying the believers of magic."

Word has spread about some negative aspect of the character, true or not. People will react negatively, but their exact response depends upon their own personal bias. See the advantage Renown for point values and recognition chances.

Klutzy: Value = 2

Max: BLAM! "Fritz?"

During non-critical situations, the character tends to drop, trip and bump into things. Dex rolls are at −1.

Magical Handicap: Value = 6

(Magic-using characters only)

The character has never learned to harness a certain type of magical energy. The player must select one of the magical components from the list starting on page 81. The character cannot cast any spells that include that component.

Magical Stigma: Value = Variable

Elinore: "Bad magic, isn't it?"

For two CGPs, the character has had negative or limited contact with magic. As a result, he is extremely uncomfortable with the arcane arts, and suffers a −1 penalty to any roll involving magic. This does not include resisting the effects of a spell, but does include interaction with magical individuals.

For four CGPs, the character suffers a major moral crisis with the use of magic, and suffers a −4 penalty.

For eight CGPs, the character will not use magic at all. He believes that magic is totally evil and cannot be trusted. All magical skills are reduced to zero and cannot be improved. He will not permit the use of magic in his presence.

Motion Sickness: Value = Variable

The character gets sick when traveling by conveyance. Each hour, the player must make a WP check. If he succeeds, the character toughs it out. If he fails, he becomes green and queasy for one hour, and all rolls are at −1. If he fails the WP roll, he must also make a CON roll. If he fails this roll, he becomes physically sick for one hour, and can do nothing but "toss his cookies."

For 3 CGPs, the player must select one of the following situations under which they will become ill:

Land conveyances (includes rosses and vehicles)

Air conveyances (includes screeches and planes)

Sea conveyances (includes boats of all types)

For 5 CGPs, the character becomes sick on all three and is always forced to sit or ride in back.

Mute: Value = Variable

Peace: "Peace wants love. Wants free. Will help."

For 3 CGPs (4 for Dwarves), the character is rather taciturn. He can speak, he just prefers not to. When this character does speak his mind, however, he is limited to three-word sentences. This character may suffer a minor penalty (–1) with Charisma skills.

For 5 CGPs, the character is completely silent. He cannot or will not speak — even under torture! The character's only means of communication is through simple gestures. Strict GMs might even forbid these players from passing notes to other players. Depending upon the situation, this character could suffer serious penalties (–5 up to zero chance of success) to Charisma skills.

Pacifism:

Due to their passive nature, Gnomes and Dwarves gain +1 CGP for this advantage. The undergrounders have a history of avoiding combat unless absolutely necessary. This is why they were seen so rarely during the movie. Most Gnomes will join local militias only in an advisory capacity.

Superstitious: Value = Variable

For 3 CGPs, the character is terrified by the supernatural (black magic, demons) and will go out of their way to avoid black cats or similar omens. When confronted by the unknown, the GM should require a Willpower roll. The result of this roll determines whether the character rubs his rabbit's foot and proceeds, or turns and bolts like a bunny.

For 5 CGPs, the character must make the roll at –5.

Susceptible to Magic: Value = 5

The character has limited natural defenses against magic, and suffers a defensive penalty of –4 to their Spirit for opposed casts.

Technological Stigma: Value = automatic/variable

Avatar: "Technology was outlawed millions of years ago . . ."

Automatic: the Faerie races, with the exception of Blue Elves and Scorch Elflings, are very uncomfortable with any technology beyond medieval. They blame technology for the destruction of the planet and "all records of past civilization." In many countries, including Montagar, technology has been outlawed completely. Unless they have the No Technological Stigma advantage, faeries receive a –1 penalty to any skill roll involving technology, including Vehicles and Small Arms. This is why PCs can't become Machinists. In some areas, technological references are used in curses (*Weehawk: "Holy Chrome!"*).

For four CGPs, the character suffers a major moral crisis with the use of technology, and suffers a –4 skill penalty.

For eight CGPs, the character will not use technology at all. He believes that technology is totally evil and cannot be trusted. All technological skills are reduced to zero and cannot be improved. The character will not permit the use of technology in his presence.

Gnome teacher: "My children, the only true technology is nature."

New Skills & Changes:

Black Market (Cha) (Difficult)

Larry: "Psst, hey general! Wanna buy elf hats, elf beards?"

City Lore would help you find the seedier parts of the city, but for security purposes, the black market stays hidden except from those who know how to find it. With this skill, the character can find and make use of use the black market in any given city. Use this skill instead of Trade when haggling for price.

Merchant: may be chosen as "Any Charisma Skill"

Bureaucracy (Will) (Difficult)

Blackwolf: "The main exterminations are complete. The remaining countries are now ruled by second-rate incompetents so confused, that even now they blame the killings on those within their own ranks."

Knowledge is useful, but patience is necessary to make your way through any system. Inevitably, the bigger the city, the more convoluted the political system. Blackwolf has had many political leaders assassinated, and their replacements are "second-rate incompetents" who try to protect themselves with red tape armor. City Lore will only help determine how bad the system is and where the offices are located. This skill will help the character find short cuts through the pool of paperwork quicksand, including less legitimate methods, such as currying favor and the best candidates for "greasing."

Envoy: swap Riding

Politician: swap Leadership

Sheriff: swap Oratory

Carousing (Cha) (Easy)

Prostitute: "Well, hello handsome!"

This is the ability to party like an animal, or to look like you're enjoying yourself when you really aren't. This skill also includes knowledge of German beer songs and drinking games. A player may opt to roll against this skill instead of Resistance to see if their character can hold his liquor.

Gambler: swap Social

Geisha: may be chosen as "Any Charisma Skill"

Lady of the Evening: swap Stamina

Cooking (Int) (Easy)

This skill might seem unimportant, at least until one of the party members drops dead from food poisoning. Sure, Survival can be used to find food in the wild, but that doesn't mean it's palatable. This character can whip together any pile of unappetizing, but edible glop into a fairly tasty meal. Given time and the proper equipment, he can prepare anything from a simple meal to a seven course feast for twenty. The character is also a bit of a culinary expert and knows when a dish has not been prepared properly. A real expert might even be able to detect large quantities of a foreign substance, like poison, if it affected the presentation or taste in some way.

Craftsman: swap Blacksmith

Geisha: swap Tumbling

Hunter: swap Stamina

Ranger: swap Herbalism

Craft (Dex) (Normal)

The character must choose one area of specialization, such as weaving, leatherworking, basket weaving. See Carpentry, page 41, for information on construction.

Craftsman: swap Carpentry

Forgery (Per) (Normal)

The character can duplicate handwriting, and given time, official documents and money. Naturally, the character must be literate in the language to be copied, or the skill is at –5 (or worse). A passive

scan of the document only requires a Forgery skill check. If the character is successful, the forgery goes undetected. If he fails, the observer must make an Alertness check at +5. Against an active check of the document's authenticity, the character must make an opposed skill check against the observer's Alertness. Have a good lie ready, just in case.

Envoy: swap Concealment

Merchant: may be chosen as "Any Charisma Skill"

Spy: swap Concealment

Thief: swap Concealment

Linguist

The following reflect changes and additions to the Linguist skill:

Calculus (I)

French: The language of choice among some of the Elven and Gnome settlements along the southern border of East Elfland near Scortch.

German: An ancient tongue, very popular in Scortch.

Hebrew: An ancient language spoken by some faerie priests.

Infernam (I)

Latin: Another ancient language, used by priests and spellcasters.

Legalese (I): A maddeningly complex code used by politicians and lawyers. It includes misleading Latin phrases and buzz words.

Snarl: Spoken by some of the goblinoid races and pig mutants.

Television (I): Only partially understood, it is supposedly the ancient language of the masses. Made up of catch phrases and obscure references, it is the object of study by priests and archeologists.

Magic

Anyone with this skill may cast spells. Practice levels add to the skill score. A character must have a basic knowledge of magic before attempting an evocation (at least skill level 1).

Mining (Int) (Difficult)

With this skill, the character can design and build shafts, locate mineral veins, and judge the purity of minerals and metals. This skill is useful in the construction of the subterranean dwellings inhabited by Gnomes and Dwarves.

Craftsman: swap Carpentry

Naturalist (Int) (Normal)

"Strange beasts lurked about, but the dangerous mutants that lived there were gone."

The character has studied animals at length, and can identify different species and breeds, both wild and domestic. On a successful roll, the character also has complete knowledge of the animal's feeding habits, temperament, special abilities, and natural habitat.

The character might also know whether any parts of the animal are marketable or choice eating. Naturally, this roll should be modified by the obscurity of the creature in question. A character might be able to make educated guesses about a unique monster found in some remote location, but not much more.

Hunter: swap Stamina

Propaganda (Int) (Normal)

Ork: "Blackwolf's got a secret weapon that makes us invincible. We can't lose!"

The character is familiar with the ideas and doctrines of a particular organization, but does not necessarily believe in them. It is the nature of these groups to attempt to spread their beliefs, either through Oratory or Guile, depending upon the nature of the organization. These doctrines can also be used to boost morale among the ranks. When used to "enhance" other skills (see Empathy), a successful Propaganda roll adds a +1 to Oratory and Leadership skill checks when dealing with a target who believes in the doctrines. Aces grant a +3, failures a –1, and blunders a –3. The player must choose one of three specializations:

Political (Naziism is popular in Scortch, but is not recommended for PCs)

Religious

Military

Politician: swap Stall

Priest: swap Ancient Lore

Wolf Soldier: add Political (Naziism) at a level equal to Technomancy

Riding Skill

The player must choose land mounts (like rosses) or flying mounts. Other than the war dragonflies ridden by mountain fairies, flying mounts are uncommon outside of Scortch.

Technomancy

Only Technomancers can design and build devices dependent upon the elusive physics of the old world. Once a device has been successfully created, it should continue to function, with routine maintenance, unless damaged or otherwise tampered with — regardless of the user. In other words, this skill is no longer required to use the Small Arms or Vehicles skills. Originally, this rule was included to limit Faerie use of technology. However, it was decided that the Technological Stigma disadvantage is more faithful to the movie. Most mutants are just too dumb to learn a skill like Technomancy. To repair a technological item, the character should roll against their Technomancy skill. The character must also have a complementary skill which reflects a general familiarity with the function of the object. Otherwise, the Technomancy skill

is reduced by half and the repair takes twice as long. For example, if Dexter wants to repair a tank, he must have Technomancy and Vehicle: Tracked.

Vehicle Skill

The character must specialize in one of the following areas:

cycles
four-wheeled (includes cars and trucks)
tracked (tanks and half tracks)
railed (trains)
planes (I) (single engine and bombers)
airships (zeppelins)

SPs and Exhaustion

Below is a list of sample SP costs. Remember, while engaged in strenuous activity, a character cannot recover lost shock points. Particularly harsh conditions may cost more than the value listed. For example, wading through a swamp in the driving rain is more tiring than skipping through the plains of Montagar. A Stamina roll will negate the effects.

Cost	Activity
variable	injuries
variable	poisons and toxins
1 SP/hour	riding
2 SP/hour	swimming
1 SP/hour	forced march
1 SP/turn	running
1d6 SP/turn	sprinting
1 SP/hour	flying (for fairies)
1 SP/hour	hard physical labor
1 SP/turn	per turn of melee combat beyond the first
1d6 SP/roll	Strength Feat

The GM should feel free to expand upon this list and modify it as necessary. For example, Dexter decides to make a truly moving speech using his Oratory skill. The GM may decide that "giving it his all" costs 1 SP, but merits a +1 to the skill roll because the audience believes he is truly sincere. Suckers.

New Beasties & Additions:

Reptilion Rex has 2 SP worth of natural armor.

Rosses: Montagar rosses have dog-like heads. Scortch rosses are darker in color than their Montagar cousins and harder to tame (-3 to Riding). The cover art portrays Necron 99 riding a Scortch ross. Scortch rosses have notoriously bad dispositions. Wild rosses have ostrich-like heads and hairless stumps for tails. Wild rosses aren't much friendlier than Scortch rosses.

Salamanders have 3 SP worth of natural armor.

Screeches: These are mutant vultures found in the mountains to the west of Scortch. They are named after the horrible sounds they make. They can carry one rider of Size 10 or less. Screeches currently make up the bulk of Blackwolf's air force, at least until a cheaper method of producing aircraft fuel can be discovered.

STR 12	DEX 14
PER 8	CON 10
SIZ 16	WP 10
MGT 14	DB n/a
SPI 5	MR 15
RS 11	REC 10
SP 36	HP 13

Bite (N) 3D damage, minimum 1 HP per strike.

Tail Slap (N) 4D damage.

Snack Rats: These voracious critters resemble New York rats, both in size and temperament. They are always hungry, and will attack any creature, regardless of size. In fact, their fang-filled maws make up about 1/3 of their body length. Their paws have evolved into simple, clumsy hands that are capable of grasping larger prey and holding on.

STR 4	DEX 14
PER 10	CON 4
SIZ 2	WP 10
MGT 3	DB n/a
SPI 5	MR 8
RS 12	REC 7
SP 16	HP 3

Bite (E) 2D6 damage, minimum 1 HP per strike.

War Dragonflies: These are larger and tougher than than the average household dragonfly. They cannot carry any rider larger than a mountain fairy.

STR 3	DEX 16
PER 6	CON 7
SIZ 2	WP 5
MGT 3	DB n/a
SPI 3	MR 8
RS 11	REC 6
SP 14	HP 5

Tail Sting (N) 1d6 damage, no minimum HP damage.

New Equipment

Demon Weapons:
Damage: +2
Reach: +1
Might: +2

These heavy, black iron weapons are forged in the fiery pits of Hell, but are unusually cold to the touch. Demons never part with their equipment willingly, and it is generally believed that a portion of the demon resides within his weapons and can see and hear everything the wielder can. Players should not be surprised when the original owner comes looking for that big, black sword they found. Naturally, the use of demonic equipment does not come without a price: the character may find himself controlled by the demon for the duration of combat. Most likely, the character will fly into a berserk, killing frenzy and attack anyone close enough to be hit. Unless a Willpower roll is made, the character will also be controlled for an additional:

1d6 Roll:	Duration
1-2	combat turn
3-4	1d6+1 combat turns
5	minute
6	1d6+1 minutes

Demon Armor:
HP: +1
SP: +2
Might: +2
Enc: +2

(For armor: equivalent of splint mail or better)

(For shields: equivalent of round metal or better)

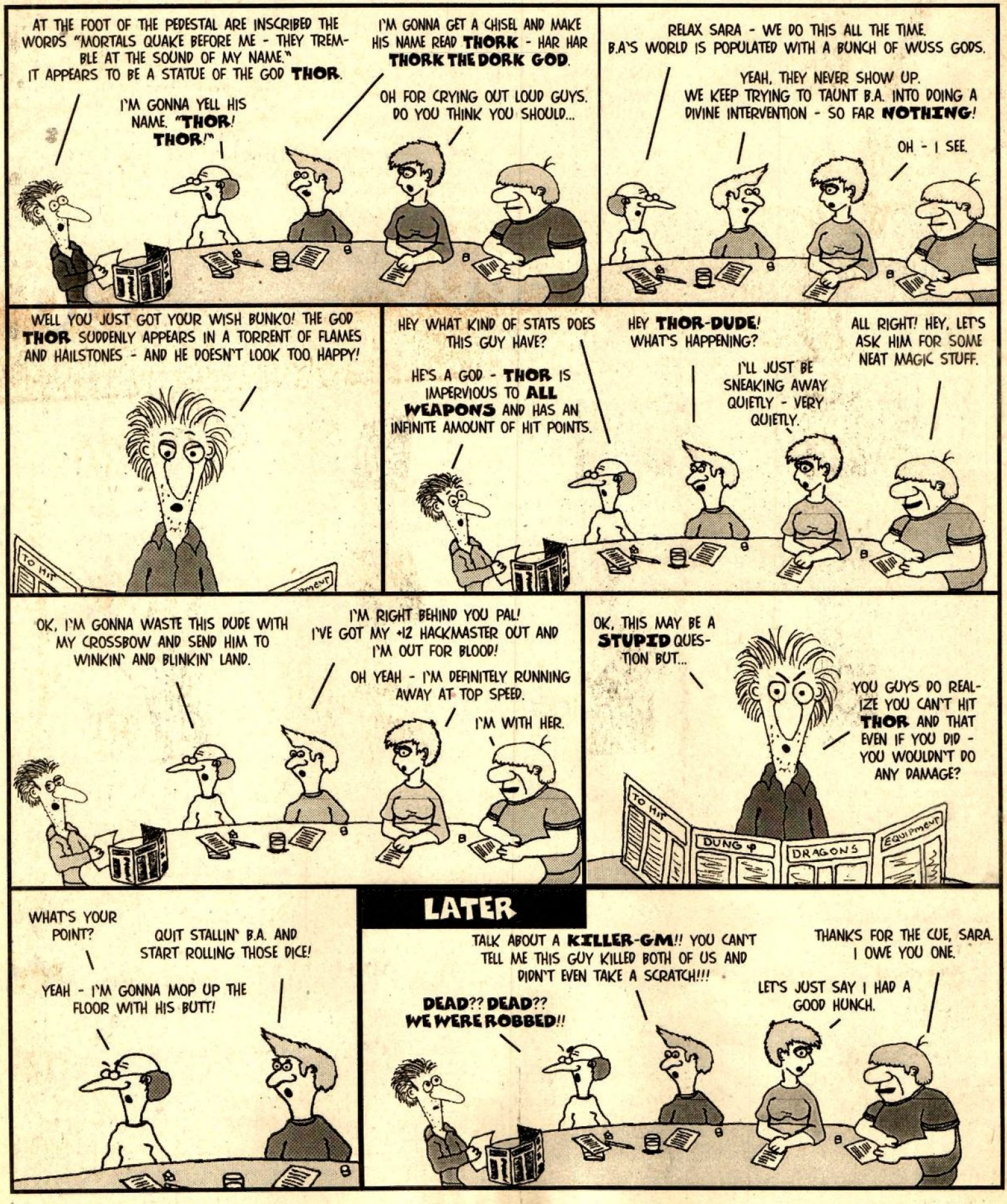
See Demon Weapons for notes on side effects.

Fairy Armor:
Light Armor: as per Padding
Heavy Armor:
HP: 1
SP: 4
Might: 2
Enc: 1
Cost: 35

These are the only types of armor available to mountain fairies. Mountain fairy armor is too small for any other race to use as anything other than a puppet. ❑

Knights of the Dinner Table™

BY JOLLY R. BLACKBURN © 1995



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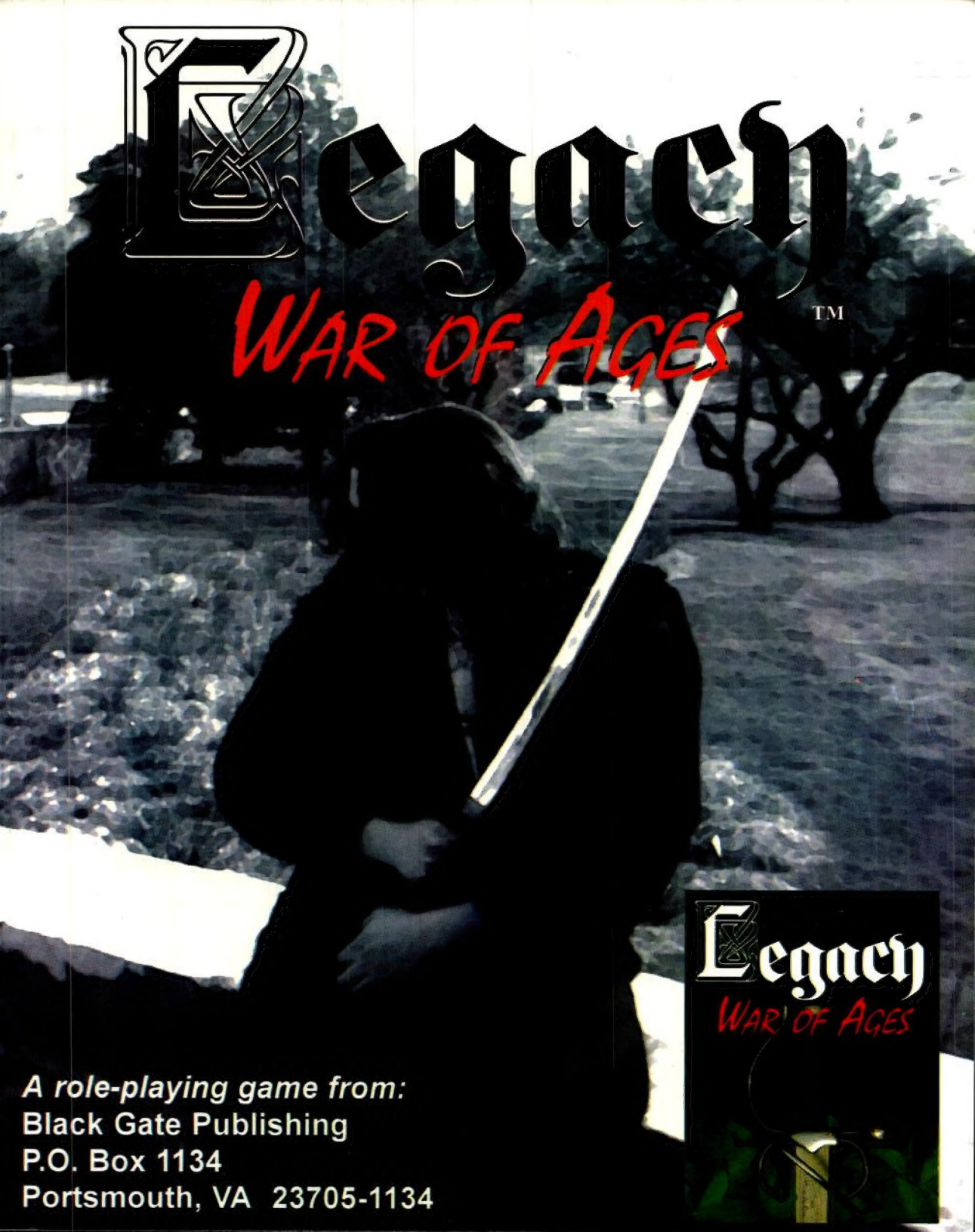

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